UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

THE ACQUISITION OF FRENCH PHONOLOGY BY ADULT
ANGLOPHONE LEARNERS: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES,
THEORY AND PRACTICE

William George Alder

<u>Master of Philosophy</u>

RESEARCH AND GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

NOVEMBER 2002

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

RESEARCH AND GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Master of Philosophy

THE ACQUISITION OF FRENCH PHONOLOGY BY ADULT ANGLOPHONE

LEARNERS: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES, THEORY AND PRACTICE

by William George Alder

The aim of this thesis is to investigate and evaluate the learning and teaching of French phonology in adult education classes where the learners' first language is English. The thesis focuses on teachers' and learners' views of areas of difficulty and their approach to these problems. Related published literature (in particular course materials) is also considered. Information gathered in these areas is related to a survey of actual learner pronunciation.

The precise research questions are introduced and an overview of French phonology is provided. A literature review establishes the context of the thesis. A historical background to the questions is presented along with a discussion of goals and criteria for the learning and teaching of pronunciation. The research project is situated in relation to existing literature and the specific challenges facing adult anglophone learners of French. Course materials are evaluated for their approaches to pronunciation.

The methodology of the research is outlined and the physical setting and participants are described.

Within this framework, the results of surveys of teachers and learners are presented. There follows a detailed study of the pronunciation of a small group of learners. The research findings are discussed to establish the extent of agreement between teachers, learners and current literature. The discussion then considers whether the pedagogical challenges are being addressed in a coherent and effective manner.

The conclusion relates the findings and discussion to the original research questions. The study concludes that there are many areas of agreement between the various parties, although a small number of significant differences also exist. Classroom activity generally corresponds to perceived problems and this is reflected in many course materials.

However, the study of learner pronunciation also reveals a number of gaps and weaknesses in existing practice. The thesis concludes that activity needs broadening in some areas and refining in others. It is argued that a consciously eclectic approach is needed to improve existing practice.

Finally, the research is evaluated and suggestions for further work in the area are outlined.

Contents

Contents of tables

Contents of extracts

Contents of samples

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Michael Grenfell, for his patient and professional help with this thesis. Thanks are also due to my colleagues and students at Hastings College of Arts and Technology who generously gave up their time to help and without whom this research could not have been conducted. Finally, I particularly thank my wife, Ann, and the rest of my family who put up for a long time with my being even more distracted than usual.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Genesis of this thesis

The origins of this thesis lie in my practical experience as a teacher and coordinator of French courses for adults in a further education college in the south-east of England. Over a period of several years, in the course of my daily professional activities, I found myself considering a number of discrete but closely connected questions concerning the teaching and learning of French pronunciation to and by English speaking adults. These questions originated in the classrooms where I taught and were further stimulated by discussions with my students and colleagues.

As I reflected on my own experiences and the conversations I had participated in, I felt the urge to investigate the existing literature on the subject to discover if there already existed a body of research on the issues which interested me. Although there were numerous studies of the phonology of French and although a substantial literature existed on the acquisition of second language phonology, I discovered that the questions I was asking myself did not have a "ready-made" answer.

1.2 The nature of the problem

In the first instance, the issues which occupied my attention were the following:

- How much agreement was there between the views expressed by my learners and my colleagues in the discussions I had with them about teaching and learning pronunciation? Were there common views held by the teachers? Did the learners agree with each other? Did teachers and learners have similar or different viewpoints?

- What were the explicit or implicit views about teaching and learning pronunciation of the course materials I had used or come into contact with?

- Did the literature on the comparative phonology of French and English, and its implications for the classroom correspond to my own experiences?

- How well would the pronunciation of my own English-speaking learners be understood by French native-speakers? Would a non-teacher native-speaker

identify the same areas of unintelligibility (and therefore teaching and learning priority) as my colleagues and my students?

In short, I wanted to find out if there were similar views held by teachers, learners, non-teacher native-speakers, published course materials and the literature of applied linguistics on the problems of teaching and learning French pronunciation. Secondly, did the various parties agree on possible solutions to these problems? Finally, was there a "match" between the perceived problems, proposed solutions and the actual speech of my own learners? Were we barking up the same tree? Were we barking up the right tree?

In the apparent absence of an existing authoritative study, I would have to try to find out for myself. My task would be to synthesise the limited existing research and to obtain new data for analysis which would, hopefully, throw light on the questions I was asking.

1.3 The aim of the research

The present research aims to increase our knowledge of a particular area of language learning and teaching, namely the acquisition of French phonology by adult English-speakers. Knowledge, in this context, is not seen in a "scientific" sense as independently existing "truths" or "facts", autonomous from the situations in which they occur. The raw material of the research is necessarily contextually defined. Nevertheless, the context is one which is broadly typical of the settings in which many adult language learners and their teachers operate. Therefore, the research findings will hopefully have relevance beyond the immediate setting in which the data has been obtained.

The research is addressed primarily to, on the one hand, teachers and adult learners of French and, on the other hand, "policy formers", in the sense of writers of course materials and syllabus designers. The main aim is to provide research findings which can assist in the clarification and improvement of the practice of language teaching and learning rather than to contribute in the more theoretical field of applied linguistics.

This is not, therefore, a study of *how* adults learn French phonology. It does not focus on issues such as "acquisition" versus "learning"; neither does it look at orders of acquisition of different features of the second language phonology or whether there are field-dependent relationships between the acquisition of phonology and other language systems. For these sorts of discussion a literature already exists - for example, Tarone (1978), Ioup and Weiberger (1987), James (1989), Tench (1996).

The present research takes as given that adults *can* improve their pronunciation of a foreign language (see Flege, 1986) and that instruction can be beneficial to this end (see Champagne-Muzar et al., 1993, and Pennington, 1998). However, I do not take a position as to the "best" teaching and learning methods or techniques. Rather, the thesis tries to determine whether there presently exists a common understanding of pronunciation problem areas; whether present understanding is borne out by an analysis of actual learner pronunciation; and whether teachers and materials writers are actually addressing the real difficulties faced by adult learners in making their spoken French phonologically intelligible.

Valdman (1976, p.vi) offers the following statement, which is both honest and, unfortunately, typical of much of the existing literature in the area: "No claim is made that the description and analysis presented of the French sound system...can contribute directly to more effective teaching of these aspects of the structure of French". At the other end of the spectrum, some of the texts which claim to provide a practical guide to teachers and learners seem more rooted in anecdote than analysis. The present research is an attempt to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical concerns.

1.4 The research questions

For the purpose of data collection, analysis and discussion, the concerns described above can be reduced to six research questions.

Question theme 1: which aspects of French phonology do teachers perceive as major causes of unintelligibility or difficulty for their learners?

Question theme 2: which aspects of French phonology do learners perceive as major causes of unintelligibility or difficulty?

Question theme 3: which aspects of French phonology are consciously taught? How are they taught?

Question theme 4: which aspects of French phonology are consciously learned? How are they learned?

Question theme 5: do existing teaching and learning materials address the perceived areas of phonological difficulty and/or unintelligibility? What are their priorities?

Question theme 6: does an analysis of learner pronunciation confirm the perceptions of difficulty held by teachers and learners and/or the priorities of teaching/learning materials?

1.5 Rationale

In order to establish a rationale for the present research, it is necessary to consider whether the research questions have already been asked and, if so, whether they have been adequately answered. In short what is this research trying to do that foregoing research has not already done?

The rationale can be most clearly perceived by revisiting each of the central question themes, examining the existing research and considering where the present research adds a new dimension or a different perspective.

1.5.1 The first two question themes

Question theme 1: which aspects of French phonology do teachers perceive as major causes of unintelligibility or difficulty for their learners?
Question theme 2: which aspects of French phonology do learners perceive as major causes of unintelligibility or difficulty?

As I have mentioned above, no systematic research has been conducted into teacher or learner views in this area. Existing knowledge, such as it is, is apocryphal and anecdotal.

To be sure, much has been written at a more general level on anticipated areas of difficulty for second language learners. This research dates back to the work on contrastive analysis, which was originally rooted in behaviourist theories of psychology and their application to language learning. Writers such as Stockwell et al. (1965) proposed that the areas of greatest difficulty (in any of the language systems) would occur where the differences between the learned habits of the first and second languages were the greatest. In principle, this dictum should be equally applicable to learners of any language background learning any other language.

Whitman and Jackson (1972), and Tarone (1978), following Selinker's (1972) work on interlanguage, proposed that it was not possible to predict areas of difficulty by comparative analysis, as each learner followed a path of natural development which was not a function of degrees of difference between first and second languages.

From the 1980s onwards, many applied linguists (e.g., Major, 1987; Odlin, 1989; Nunan, 1995) took a more balanced view, arguing that both natural development and first language transfer influenced the acquisition of second languages in general and phonology in particular. The discussion has continued right up to the present with the contribution by James (1998) in which he discusses "contrast analysis" which contrasts the learner's first language with their interlanguage (as opposed to a native-speaker model).

The present research seeks to establish how the views of a group of teachers and learners currently engaged in the teaching and learning of a second language actually compare to the ideas proposed at a theoretical level by applied linguists over the last half century. Are the views of teachers and learners underpinned (either explicitly or implicitly) by any of the existing theoretical approaches?

There also exists a fairly substantial literature discussing whether learner difficulty is likely to be found more in segmental (i.e. individual phonemes) or suprasegmental

(i.e. longer units of speech) areas of the second language phonological system. Much of the contrastive analysis literature on phonology concentrated on individual phonemes, but this viewpoint was challenged by later writers such as Haycraft (1992); Ross (1992); Anderson-Hsieh et al. (1992) and Brown (1995), who all emphasized the centrality of features such as rhythm and intonation to comprehensibility in a second language. With regard to learners of French in particular, this point was being made earlier still by MacCarthy (1975) and Tranel (1987).

But what do teachers and learners think are more important – segmental or suprasegmental features? Or do they give them an equal weight? Brown (1995: 172) says that "it is unfortunate that vowel and consonant segments constitute the main focus in the minds of many teachers and learners." Is this, in fact, true? The present research aims to provide a concrete answer to this question in a given context.

1.5.2 The third and fourth question themes

Question theme 3: which aspects of French phonology are consciously taught? How are they taught?

Question theme 4: which aspects of French phonology are consciously learned? How are they learned?

These questions flow from question themes one and two. It might be thought that teachers and learners would concentrate their efforts on those areas of phonology which they had identified as being most difficult and therefore, presumably, most important from the point of view of successful oral communication. But does this happen in reality? Do the remedial actions taken by teachers and learners follow logically from their diagnoses of what constitute the principal phonological problem areas? And if teachers and learners agree on the problems, do they also agree on the solutions?

Nunan (1995: 115) suggests that "pronunciation is a neglected skill in many classrooms, despite the obvious importance attached to it by learners." Is this true in typical learning situations for adult students of French? Does the evidence of teachers and learners suggest that phonological problems are being treated in a planned, systematic way or is there a more haphazard, *ad hoc* approach?

Ross (1992: 443) proposes that "Contemporary pronunciation theory has discounted the primacy of the phonemic segment as the building block of a pronunciation syllabus and replaced it with suprasegmental elements such as pitch, tone and stress." This may well be true of "contemporary pronunciation theory", but what of contemporary pronunciation *practice*? Is this an accurate description of what happens when French pronunciation is taught and learned in actual adult French language classes?

In short, are the assertions of applied linguists such as Nunan and Ross borne out by the evidence collected from teachers and learners? Existing classroom-based research on these questions is scarce or non-existent. And it is to these questions, amongst others, that the present research addresses itself.

Researchers such as Champagne-Muzar et al. (1993): Macdonald et al. (1995) and Derwing et al. (1998) have considered the possible effectiveness of different methods of pronunciation instruction. Although these articles make for interesting reading as a potential guide to more successful teaching and learning, they do not deal with the issue of whether the methods discussed actually address the perceptions and preoccupations of teachers and learners.

1.5.3 The fifth question theme

Question theme 5: do existing teaching and learning materials address perceived areas of phonological difficulty and/or unintelligibility? What are their priorities?

Most, but not all, published teaching and learning materials for adult anglophone learners of French include material on pronunciation. This material, in its content and pedagogical method, reflects the explicit or implicit theoretical assumptions of the authors concerning which aspects of the French phonological system are problematical for learners and how these problems should be approached.

To my knowledge, there has been no systematic analysis of how these theoretical positions are represented in practical teaching and learning materials. Is there agreement or disagreement between materials writers and the teachers and learners for

whom they are writing on these issues? Given that little or no systematic research has been conducted into the perceptions of teachers and learners, it follows that this is a highly pertinent issue and one which the present research seeks to address.

1.5.4 The sixth question theme

Question theme 6: does an analysis of learner pronunciation confirm the perceptions of difficulty held by teachers and learners and/or the priorities of teaching/learning materials?

In many ways this is the most important question theme, as the information obtained in response gives the research its practical value as a possible guide to future practice.

Whether there is agreement or disagreement in the perceptions of teachers and learners about the causes of phonological difficulty is interesting for the potential light it may throw on attitudes and approaches in the classroom. The premises and priorities of published teaching and learning materials concern us, in that they enable us to see more clearly whether materials writers are addressing the issues that really concern those who will use the materials.

However, in a sense, the answers to the above questions have a primarily descriptive value. The information which is most important as a possible guide to improvements in practice concerns whether the perceptions and opinions of any of the above – learners, teachers, applied linguists, materials writers – actually correspond to the real problems that learners face in their acquisition and use of the French phonological system. The only way to determine this is by the collection and analysis of samples of learner speech covering the aspects of French phonology which have been considered in the foregoing question themes.

An important by-product of the analysis of learner speech for the effect of pronunciation on comprehensibility is whether the issue of *difficulty*, which has been posed in the first five question themes is the same as *intelligibility*, which the study of samples of learner speech aims to assess. Are the phonological areas where learners encounter the greatest difficulty necessarily the most important from the point of view of successful oral communication?

Munro and Derwing (1999) have considered whether what they call "accentedness" is the same thing as intelligibility. However, this essentially involves the same set of listeners assessing learner speech (in this case, Mandarin-speaking learners of English) for two different features of pronunciation, i.e. how "accented" is the speech and how intelligible is it. The present research differs in that it considers whether the factors determining the intelligibility of actual learner speech are the same as those which are perceived to be likely causes of difficulty by teachers, learners, applied linguists and materials writers.

If it were to transpire that the areas perceived as being difficult are not the same as those features which actually cause a breakdown in learner intelligibility, then it would follow that present assumptions, attitudes and practices need to be reassessed. Rather than basing pronunciation teaching and learning on the rather subjective criterion of what is considered to be difficult, the parties involved would in fact need to orient their practice to the features which cause incomprehensibility.

To my knowledge, only one published survey similar to the present research exists – Nott's 1994 article Pronunciation: does it matter? (Nott, 1994). In my discussion of the significance of the present research findings in relation to existing knowledge (chapter eight below), I will seek to compare the results of the two studies, but it is also important to note the differences in context and approach.

- Nott describes "errors", rather than errors affecting intelligibility
- Nott's survey is based entirely on continuous speech
- Nott's study is of university students, rather than "general" adult learners
- Nott was his "own listener", whereas my survey used an independent listener
- Nott carried out his survey over a period of seven years, using 236 learners
- Nott uses slightly different categories to describe errors to those I have used
- Nott's study was not carried out under "controlled" conditions

> ...students' errors of pronunciation were noted primarily for pedagogical, rather than statistical, purposes, along with errors of vocabulary and grammar, and comments of a more general nature. This means, for example, that not all errors made were noted (or, in some cases, noticed!): the 'rate of errors' noted is not an absolute guide to the frequency of these errors in these students spoken French.

...it is likely that the criteria for selection of errors to be noted will have varied from one student to another and one year to another (Nott, 1994: 4).

In conclusion, then, it is my contention that the present research asks questions which are significantly different to those posed in the existing literature. If it is able to answer these questions at all fully, then the present research could, in however small a way, add to existing knowledge in the area and perhaps provide information and insights which can contribute towards improvements in practice.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, this thesis is divided into eight further chapters. Chapter two provides an overview of the French phonological system to help orient the reader with regard to the background against which judgements concerning learner intelligibility are made. Chapter three consists of a description of the historical background to the subject, a discussion of goals and criteria for measuring learner performance and an in-depth review of literature in the area. Chapter four examines published course materials in terms of their approach to the teaching and learning of French pronunciation. Chapter five sets out the methodology of the research. Chapters six and seven present the data which was obtained using the different research instruments. Chapter eight is a discussion of issues arising from the research findings. In Chapter nine conclusions are drawn and the research is evaluated.

Chapter Two

The Phonology of French - an overview

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to help signpost the reader and provide background to the research data and discussion. In what follows I will give what I hope is a concise and uncontroversial description of French phonology. My purpose is to describe those features of native-speaker pronunciation against which learners are to be measured in order to make judgements as to whether their pronunciation is comfortably and acceptably intelligible.

The chapter will consider both segmental and suprasegmental features of the French phonological system. The fact that in my description, after some general remarks, I start with the smallest units (phonemes) and then progress to the larger units (suprasegmentals) does not imply at all that there is any such hierarchy of importance in either description or pedagogy

2.1.1 Variations in pronunciation and its description

As with English, or any other widely spoken language, not all French-speakers pronounce their language in the same way. There may be quite substantial differences based on regional or national (within the wider French-speaking world) variations, age, educational background, social attitudes and discourse conditions such as the formality of a situation or the speed of utterance. The French pronunciation described in this chapter is what Price calls "the kind that educated Parisians might use in everyday conversation" (Price 1991: 3) and Martinet and Walter (1973) describe as "français standard". Although it may not be identical to the pronunciation of the teachers involved in the present research (who include non-native speakers and a Belgian amongst their number), some of the course materials to which learners have access or to many of the native speakers with whom the learners have contact, it is the standard adopted by the recognised descriptive literature on French phonology and I have therefore followed it.

It is not my intention to enter into any of the debates within descriptions of French phonology as that is outside the purpose of this study. Therefore I have attempted to follow what may be considered the "traditional" classifications of texts such as Carton (1974); Walter (1977) and Léon and Léon (1997). Where alternative systems of description exist, such, as Callamand (1981) and Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991), I have outlined these in an attempt to clarify the features being described without taking sides as to which system is the more accurate or complete.

2.1.2 Representation of pronunciation

The systems of transcription I have used are those in common use in phonemic descriptions of English and French. Whilst these systems are not as comprehensive as the International Phonetic Alphabet (which seeks to account for all *possible* variations in sound) they *are* able to describe meaningful distinctions in sound between the two languages under investigation. It also allows us to distinguish between approximant sounds, such as the vowel phonemes in the French *vie* /i/ and English *heel* /iː/ or French *plat* /a/ and English *apple* /æ/.

Within the descriptions of the phonemes of French there is some disagreement in the phonemic representation of the nasal vowel sound in the word *on*. Most reference texts, such as Goldie, et al (1991: xxii) and Nott (1998: 31), use /ɔ̃/, whereas Callamand (1981: 4) and Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991: 8) use /õ/. The former representation is the more common, so I have used it in the following descriptions.

2.2 The Pronunciation of French
2.2.1 Some General Considerations

In the following section I will look at the vowels, semi-vowels and consonant sounds of French. These descriptive terms refer to phonology, not graphology, that is, sounds not letters. A *vowel* is "a sound made without closure or audible friction" (of the speech organs). A *consonant* is a sound "produced when the vocal tract is either blocked or so restricted that there is audible friction". A *semi-vowel/semi-consonant* is a sound that "displays certain properties of vowels and consonants" (Crystal, 1987: 433, 417, 430).

At the level of phonemes (that is, the smallest units in a language) certain sounds are often described as being the "same" or "similar" in French and English. Walter (1987: 43-44) identifies as "equivalent or near-equivalent" six vowels, fifteen consonants and two semi-vowels out of a total inventory of 45 English and 37 French phonemes, that is to say over half of the total phonemes in each language. However, it should be remarked that while such phonemes may be close enough to be considered "the same" for the purpose of classification, they are in fact often distinct in their realisation due to certain "global" features in the articulation of the two languages.

French is pronounced with much greater articulatory tension than English. Indeed Delattre (1951: 37) and Carton (1974: 42) claim that *no* other language is pronounced with comparable muscular energy and tension! Bras (1975: 27) connects this tension of articulation to the syllabic regularity of French:

> Spoken French is characterised by a real regularity of articulation which values each syllable, stressed or unstressed. Each syllable is pronounced with enough tension to avoid any pitch variation. This stability of articulation...is made possible by an intense energy displayed by the articulation and above all by an active use of the lips. In order to develop good pronunciation habits in French, the English-speaking student must keep in mind this physiological requirement.

Carton (1974: 130-132) also identifies *anteriorité* (i.e. a low tongue position) as a defining feature of the articulation of French. Taylor (1996: 33) suggests that this is particularly true of the articulation of certain consonant sounds (specifically, /t/, /d/, /l/ and /n/) where the tongue lies substantially lower in the mouth in French than it would in English.

2.2.2 Classification of the Sounds of French

As has already been mentioned above, there is a difference between the "traditional" system of describing the articulation of French and a "minority" system. The "traditional" description (e.g., Carton, 1974; Walter, 1977; Léon and Léon, 1977) uses the notions of point of articulation, height of tongue/degree of aperture, lip configuration and orality/nasality to describe the articulation of French vowel sounds.

The concepts of point of articulation, manner/mode of articulation and presence/absence of voice are used to describe the production of consonant sounds.

The "minority" description uses the concepts of lip configuration (*la labialité*), pitch (*l'acuité*) and tension (*la tension*) to describe both vowel and consonant phonemes. For Callamand (1981: 7) and Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991: 6-7), the concept of *labialité* replaces the distinction between *écarté* (spread) and *arrondi* (rounded) used in earlier classification systems of French phonology, whilst *tension* corresponds to the traditional *sourd* (unvoiced) and *sonore* (voiced) distinction. Guimbretière (1994: 19) admits that this model of classification has certain weaknesses at the level of strict phonetic description because it omits certain important details. However, she argues that it has a great advantage over the traditional system in that it has a clearer pedagogic value for teachers and learners alike.

What matters for us is not which system provides the more comprehensive or exact classification but the extent to which either can give us insights into the challenge facing the anglophone learner of French in attaining a standard of pronunciation which is close enough to that of the native-speaker to be comfortably and acceptably intelligible.

2.3 The Phonemes of French
It is commonly accepted that French has thirty-seven distinct phonemes: sixteen vowels, eighteen consonants and three semi-vowels or semi-consonants (sometimes referred to as *glides*). Carton (1974: 71), basing himself on research conducted by Denes and Pinson (1963), states that vowels and consonants have a roughly equal frequency, the former representing forty eight per cent and the latter fifty two per cent of sounds used in typical French speech.

In contrast, Denes and Pinson say that in North American English a typical speaker uses twice as many consonant sounds as vowels. The five vowels /a/, /i/, /e/, /ə/ and /ɛ/ represent sixty five per cent of vowel occurrences and the four consonants /R/, /l/,

/s/ and /t/ account for half of consonant occurrences. Eight phonemes - /R/, /a/, /i/, /l/, /s/, /e/, /ə/, /t/ - are responsible for fifty per cent of total phonemes occurrences.

Simonin (1975), whose figures vary slightly from those of Carton, gives the following frequency for all phonemes.

Phoneme	Example	Frequency (%)	Phoneme	Example	Frequency(%)
/a/	natte	8.1	/y/	venu	2.0
/R/	roi	6.9	/ɔ̃/	bon	2.0
/l/	lent	6.8	/ʒ/	jeu	1.7
/e/	nez	6.5	/ɔ/	or	1.5
/s/	sale	5.8	/ɛ̃/	pain	1.4
/i/	ami	5.6	/f/	faim	1.3
/ɛ/	lait	5.3	/b/	barbe	1.2
/ə/	premier	4.9	/j/	œil	1.0
/t/	tarte	4.5	/w/	oui	0.9
/k/	classe	4.5	/ɥ/	lui	0.7
/p/	passe	4.3	/z/	rose	0.6
/d/	dans	3.5	/ø/	pneu	0.6
/m/	mon	3.4	/ʃ/	hache	0.5
/ã/	vent	3.3	/œ̃/	brun	0.5
/n/	nous	2.8	/œ/	beurre	0.3
/u/	loup	2.7	/g/	glace	0.3
/v/	vif	2.4	/ɑ/	pâte	0.2
/o/	pot	2.2	/ɲ/	vigne	0.1

Table 2.1 The frequency of phonemes in French. Simonin (1975)

Delattre (1951, 19) argues that the characterisation of French as a *vocalic* language is not simply due to the high frequency of vowel phonemes (Italian and Spanish have an even higher frequency of vowels). Rather it is the combination of a vowel frequency much higher than that of English *along with* the tendency to open syllabification

which poses a particular challenge to the high consonant frequency, high closed syllabification pronunciation habits of the anglophone learner.

A syllable is "open" when it ends with a pronounced vowel (for example, *Paris* /i/). A syllable is "closed" when it ends with a pronounced consonant (for example, *facteur* /R/). According to Valdman (1976: 86-7)

"French is characterised by open syllabification…Statistical data on the composition of syllables in random samples of French …show that 76 per cent of 3,000 syllables were open; a comparable English corpus contained only 40 per cent open syllables"

Léon (1996: 96-7) contrasts -

Si je l'ai pas regardé c'est à cause de Jean

si + ʒle + pɑ + RgaR + de + sɛ + tɑ + koz + də + ʒɑ̃ -

ten syllables, of which eight are open, with -

If I didn't look at him it's because of John

ɪf + aɪ + dɪdnt + lʊk + ət + hɪm + ɪts + bə + kɔz + əv + dʒɔn -

eleven syllables, of which nine are closed, to show the contrast between typical French and English syllabification systems.

The importance of open syllabification to a high standard of pronunciation by learners of French is emphasised by much of the literature on this question (for example, Delattre, 1951; Bras,1975; Valdman, 1976 and Léon, 1996).

2.3.1 The Vowels

It is commonly accepted that French has sixteen vowel phonemes. These are shown below in their phonetic transcription with an exemplar word for each. The examples are taken from the Harrap's *Shorter French and English Dictionary*.

/a/	chat	/ʃa/
/ɑ/	âge	/ɑʒ/
/e/	été	/ete/
/ə/	le	/lə/
/ø/	feu	/fø/
/œ/	seul	/sœl/
/ɛ/	elle	/ɛl/
/i/	vite	/vit/
/ɔ/	donner	/dɔne/
/o/	dos	/do/
/u/	tout	/tu/
/y/	cru	/kRy/
/ɑ̃/	enfant	/ɑ̃fɑ̃/
/ɛ̃/	vin	/vɛ̃/
/ɔ̃/	mon	/ɔ̃/
/œ̃/	un	/œ̃/

Table 2.2 The vowels of French. Goldie et al (1991)

17

Price (1991, 26) classifies these phonemes as follows:

Oral	Front unrounded	Front rounded	Back rounded
High	/i/	/y/	/u/
High-mid	/e/	/ø/	/o/
Low-mid	/ɛ/	/œ/ /ə/	/ɔ/
Low	/a/		/ɑ/

Nasal	Front unrounded	Front rounded	Back rounded
Mid	/ɛ̃/	/œ̃/	/ɔ̃/
Low			/ɑ̃/

Table 2.3 Classification of the vowels of French. Price (1991).

Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991: 8) adopt the following classification:

LES VOYELLES AIGUES		LES VOYELLES GRAVES	
non labiales	**labiales**	**labiales**	**moins labiales**
/i/	/y/	/u/	/ə/
/e/	/ø/	/o/	/ɔ/
/ɛ/	/œ/	/ɔ̃/	/ɑ̃/
/ɛ̃/	/œ̃/		/ɑ/
	/a/		

les plus tendues: /i/ /y/ /e/ /ø/

les plus tendues: /u/ /o/ /ɔ̃/

Table 2.4 Classification of the vowels of French. Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991)

An important difference between the French and English vowel systems is that there are no diphthongs in French. Tranel (1987: 42) considers that:

> In general, the elimination of diphthongised vowels and the production of monophthongal vowels constitutes one of the most important goals for the native-speaker of English desiring to acquire a good pronunciation of French

With the exception of the elision of the phoneme /ə/ in specific circumstances, French vowels are always pronounced with their full value (there being no equivalent to the "reduced" vowels of English).

English contains twelve oral vowels and eight diphthongs, whereas French has twelve oral vowels, four nasal vowels and no diphthongs. Six of the oral vowels are similar in English and French: /ɑ/, /i/, /ɛ/, /u/, /ø/, /ə/. Thus the anglophone learner of French has to learn how to produce six new oral vowels and four new nasal vowels.

Contrary to what is often said, English *does* have nasal vowels, that is vowels produced with the lowering of the velum which separates the oral and nasal cavities (Valdman, 1976: 5-6). Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between the two languages. In French, nasal vowels contrast with oral vowels and serve to distinguish words from each other, for example *très* (/tRɛ/) and *train* (/tRɛ̃/). The vowel /ɛ̃/ in the latter word differs from the vowel of *très* (/ɛ/) only by its nasal articulation. Whilst English has a large variety of nasal vowels (compare, for example, *pat* and *pant*, *sit* and *sin*, *sad* and *sang*), they occur only before a nasal consonant (*m*, *n* or *ng*) and never contrast with oral vowels. In other words, the nasality of English vowels is automatic: before non-nasal consonants, nasal vowels do not appear; before a nasal consonant, only nasal vowels may appear.

The Semi-vowels

French has three semi-vowels (also called semi-consonants or glides). These are:

/j/	piano	/pjano/
/w/	ouest	/west/
/ɥ/	huit	/ɥit/

Table 2.5 The semi-vowels/semi-consonants of French. Price (1991)

The first two of these have similar sounds in English, for example /j/ in *yet* (/yet/) and /w/ in *wet* (/wet/), leaving one new sound to be learned.

The Consonants

French has eighteen consonants. These are shown below with their phonetic transcription and exemplar words. Once again the examples are taken from *Harrap* (1991).

/b/	beau	/bo/
/d/	donner	/dɔne/
/f/	feu	/fø/
/g/	garde	/gaRd/
/ʒ/	gilet	/ʒilɛ/
/k/	camp	/kã/
/l/	lait	/lɛ/
/m/	mon	/mɔ̃/
/n/	né	/ne/
/ŋ/	parking	/paRkiŋ/
/ɲ/	campagne	/kãpaɲ/
/p/	pain	/pɛ̃/
/R/	rare	/RaR/
/s/	sou	/su/
/ʃ/	chose	/ʃoz/
/t/	table	/tabl/
/v/	voir	/vwaR/
/z/	cousin	/kuzɛ̃/

Table 2.6 The consonants of French. Goldie et al (1991)

Price (1991: 35) provides the following summary:

Manner of articulation	Bilabial or labio-dental Voiceless	Bilabial or labio-dental Voiced	Dental or alveolar Voiceless	Dental or alveolar Voiced	Post-alveolar or palatal Voiceless	Post-alveolar or palatal Voiced	Velar Voiceless	Velar Voiced
Point of articulation								
Stop	/p/	/b/	/t/	/d/			/k/	/g/
Fricative	/f/	/v/	/s/	/z/	/ʃ/	/ʒ/	/R/	
Lateral			/l/					
Nasal	/m/		/n/		/ɲ/		/ŋ/	

Table 2.7 Classification of the consonants of French. Price (1991)

This is in line with the "traditional" description, although both Valdman (1976: 27) and Battye and Hintze (1992: 87) describe /R/ as "pharyngal/uvular". There is however agreement on the physical characteristics of the articulation of /R/: the velum (i.e. the moveable part of the soft palate) is lowered so that the uvular (the small pendant of flesh attached to the velum) lies forward on the tongue; the tongue is pressed against the lower front teeth with the point curved downward; then the back of the tongue is made to vibrate (as when gargling).

Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991: 8), following Callamand (1981)
use their system of classification to describe the French consonants in the following
way:

LES CONSONNES AIGUES		LES CONSONNES GRAVES
non labiales	labiales	toutes labiales
/t/ /s/	/ʃ/	/p/ /f/
/d/ /z/	/ʒ/	/b/ /v/
/n/ /ɲ/		/m/
/l/ /j/	/ɥ/	/w/
tendues:		tendues:
/t/ /s/ /ʃ/		/p/ /f/

LES CONSONNES NEUTRES	
non labiales	
tendues:	relachees:
/k/	/g/ /R/

Table 2.8 Classification of the consonants of French. Kaneman-Pougatch and
Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991)

Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière omit /ŋ/, possibly because it usually
occurs in words of foreign origin e.g. *parking.*

Seventeen of these sounds have similar phonemes in English. However, it should be
remembered that "similar" includes allophones or approximants, i.e. sounds which are
"close enough" to be represented by the same phonemic symbol but which may,
nevertheless, differ in their realisation. For example, the consonant phonemes /p/, /b/,
/t/, /d/, /k/ and /g/ are all usually aspirated in English but not in French. We will return
to the possible importance of this for learners in chapters seven and eight.

Therefore, the anglophone learner of French has only one *completely* new sound to learn in this area - /R/. From this it might appear that consonant phonemes will pose few problems. Whether this is, in fact, the case will be considered in a later chapter.

2.4 Suprasegmental Features

By this term we understand all those features of the phonology of a language greater than individual phonemes. This may includes features at the level of individual words (for example, stress within a word) or features of connected speech, such as intonation. Within the French language literature on phonology, suprasegmental features are usually referred to as *la prosodie*.

2.4.1 Word stress and group stress

In many European languages, such as English, German, Russian and Welsh, some syllables within words are given greater prominence (as a result of being pronounced with greater articulatory energy) than others. This is usually referred to as *word stress*. When French words are pronounced in isolation, the stress always falls on the last syllable, for example: phoTO, photoGRAPHE, photograPHIQUE. In English, on the other hand, word stress placement is much less predictable, for example: PHOto, phoTOGrapher, photoGRAPHic. Tranel (1987: 34) suggests that:

> Another essential difference between the two languages is the *strength of stress* ('la force de l'accent'): stress is much stronger in English than in French...Looking at things from the reverse perspective...unstressed syllables in English are much less prominent than unstressed syllables in French.

However, in French the normal stress is associated not with the word but with the rhythmic group (that is to say, a series of syllables spoken without a pause). There is no set number of syllables in a rhythm group, but the usual number is between three and seven according to the composition of the utterance.

According to Bras (1975: 192): "each rhythmic group carries in itself a certain meaning, not necessarily complete."

The normal stress pattern in French is for the final syllable in a group to be lengthened, thereby momentarily slowing down delivery and creating a stressed

syllable. Thus: Madame Du*pont* n'est pas *là* aujour*d'hui*. (Madame Dupont isn't there today.) Guimbretière (1994: 34) proposes that the stressed syllable is on average twice as long as an unstressed syllable. Along with Wioland (1991), she insists that it is the *duration* of the syllable which characterises stress in French not the pitch or the volume.

Whilst final stress is the normal pattern in French, there are instances where the initial syllable in a rhythm group may be stressed. In French this is known as *accent d'insistance* and is usually used to express emphasis on a particular word or a contrast. Nott (1998: 56-57) gives the following examples for emphatic stress:

Tonic pronouns: *lui,* il n'a rien dit   *he* didn't say anything
Numbers: *trois* cafés, s'il vous plaît!   *three* coffees, please!
Exclamations: *qu'est-ce* qu'il fait chaud! *my*, it's hot!
WH-questions: *quand* est-ce qu'on part? *when* are we leaving

Malécot (1977: 26) also distinguishes an *accent affectif.* He distinguishes this from the *accent d'insistance* by arguing that the former is *consonantique* whereas the latter is *vocalique.* For example:

Accent affectif: *"Il est ffformidable!"*
                  "C'est un cccatastrophe!"

Accent d'insistance: *"Votez pour le PROgrès!"*
                       "J'insiste que ce soit MAINtenant!"

Contrastive initial stress occurs when there is an explicit contrast between syllables, each of which is stressed, e.g.: "il n'arrive pas *LUN*di, il arrive *MAR*di."

Emphatic and contrastive stress both occur in English and therefore seem unlikely to pose any problems to the anglophone learner, unlike the major difference between word and group stress in English and French respectively.

Finally, I will make a brief comment on the question of whether it is useful to characterise French as a "syllable-timed" language in contrast to the "stress-timing" of English. This distinction goes back to Pike (1946, cited in Guimbretière, 1994: 39). The idea is that in French there is "a constant rate of syllable succession"

(Abercrombie 1967: 98). MacCarthy (1975: 6) describes the effect as "staccato, rather like a machine gun" and Battye and Hintze (1992: 130) suggest that "when listening to connected speech by a native-speaker of French, one gets the impression of a regular succession of syllables uttered at a rather staccato and steady rate until a pause is reached".

According to the theory of syllable timing, it follows that the length of an utterance in French is exclusively determined by the total number of syllables in it; whereas in English the length of time of the utterance is based on the number of *stressed* syllables irrespective of how many unstressed syllables come between them. So a sentence with ten syllables and one with five syllables may take about the same time to say if each has five stressed syllables. Swan and Walter (1984: x) compare "'Ann 'Grant 'lives near 'Bath" (five syllables, of which four are stressed) with "'Ann and 'Martin 'settled 'near Dun'fermline" (ten syllables, of which five are stressed).

In a long and highly technical riposte to this view Wenk and Wioland (1982) have argued that if it is recognised that the final syllable in a rhythm group is stressed, and that rhythm groups do not have a set number of syllables, then it does not make sense to say that French is "syllable-timed". They support this view with a temporal analysis of utterances by French speakers. Following Crystal (1975), they propose that it is over simplistic to make a rigid distinction between languages using the concepts of "stress-" and "syllable-timing". Their conclusion is that French does have stress and rhythm patterns but that these are utterly different from English, the notion of French as a "syllable-timed" language having been propagated by anglophone writers attempting to see French through the prism of English and using the phonological features of the latter language to describe the former.

It suffices for the purposes of this study to acknowledge that French does have stressed syllables within rhythm groups and that these are highly distinct from the word stress and rhythm patterns of English. Therefore it follows that these areas are likely to be important in investigating the acquisition of French pronunciation by English-speaking learners.

2.4.2 Intonation

In common with English, the intonation systems (i.e. the differences of pitch that occur in speech) of French are highly complex. Normally, intonation is a function of the type of utterance being made (e.g., statements, questions, commands). However, these basic patterns may be modified by the intentions and attitudes of the speaker. Malécot (1977: 20) sums up the situation by saying that: "l'intonation est en réalité la somme de plusieurs systèmes superposés, l'un determiné par la *grammaire,* un autre par les *intentions* du locuteur, un troisième par ses *émotions,* etc." ("In reality intonation is the sum of several superimposed systems, one determined by grammar, another by the intentions of the speaker, a third by his/her feelings, etc.".)
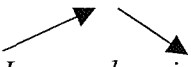
In general, the effect of these factors personal to the speaker are to exaggerate the peaks and dips in the voice, or, when there is emphatic stress to cause the stressed syllable to be pitched at a higher level than would otherwise be the case. As these factors do not therefore fundamentally alter the principal tone patterns, I will concentrate in this section on how intonation may be determined by the grammatical function of an utterance. The examples are taken from Price (1991: 149-56).

Declarative sentences (i.e. those which make a statement) can be divided into three tone patterns according to whether they consist of one, two or more than two rhythmic groups.
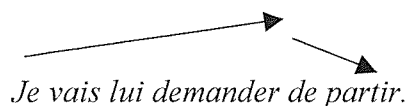
A declarative sentence consisting of no more than two syllables has a falling intonation:

J'arrive.

Longer utterances (but still of one rhythm group) have a rising-falling intonation:
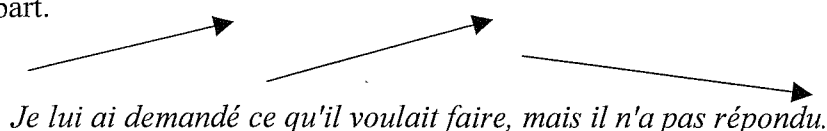
Je pars demain.

Declarative sentences consisting of two rhythm groups have a rising intonation on the first group and a falling intonation on the second:

Je vais lui demander de partir.

In declarative sentences consisting of three or more rhythm groups, there is once again a rising-falling intonation. The exact intonation pattern will be determined by the point at which the utterance is divided into sense-groups. Each rhythm group in the first part of the utterance has a rising intonation, whereas each group in the second part has a falling intonation. The peak is on the final syllable of the last group of the first part.
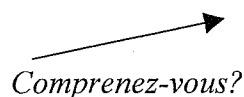
Je lui ai demandé ce qu'il voulait faire, mais il n'a pas répondu.
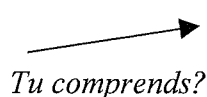
Je lui ai écrit, mais il a dit que c'était trop tard.

Yes-no questions have a rising intonation. This applies both to questions formed by inversion of the pronoun subject and to those in which the word order is the same as in a declarative sentence. In the latter it is *only* the intonation which indicates that a question is being asked.
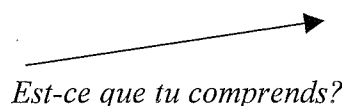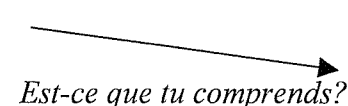
Comprenez-vous?   *Tu comprends?*

Questions introduced by *est-ce que* may have either a rising or falling intonation (often determined by the intentions or emotions of the speaker). For example:

Est-ce que tu comprends?   *Est-ce que tu comprends?*

In the first case, the rising intonation signals a "genuine" question, with no particular implied attitude on the part of the speaker. In the second case, the falling intonation signals an attitude of disapproval ("You should understand!"), such as might be used when scolding a child.

WH-questions (which perhaps in French could be called QU-questions?) have a falling intonation.

Qui a dit cela?   *Que cherche ton père?*   *Où allez-vous?*
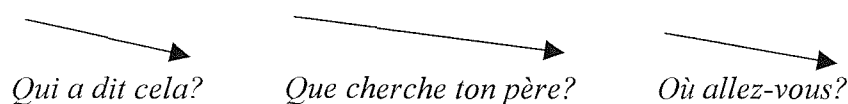
If there is more than one rhythm group, each starts on a higher pitch than the end of the preceding one.

Quand a-t-il acheté ce dictionnaire?
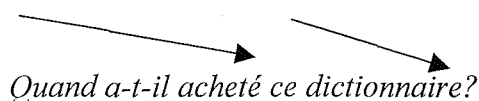
Imperative sentences have a falling intonation.

Regardez-le!
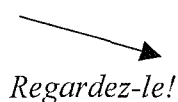
In imperative sentences consisting of more than one rhythm group, the general pattern is falling, but the final syllable of each group except the last rises slightly.

Allez lui dire de ne pas partir.
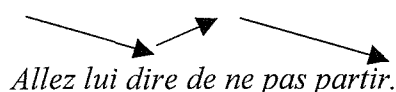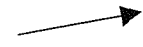
While no complete utterances have a level intonation throughout, a level tone may occur with elements within a sentence which do not form part of its basic structure. This occurs mainly in relation to parenthetical comments, vocative expressions (e.g., the name or title of the person to whom one is speaking) and the phrase *s'il te/vous plaît.*

'Si vous l'aviez vu', a-t-il declaré, 'vous auriez compris'.

Si vous voulez, monsieur, vous pouvez entrer.   *Tu viens, Jean-Paul?*

Pouvez-vous m'aider, s'il vous plaît?
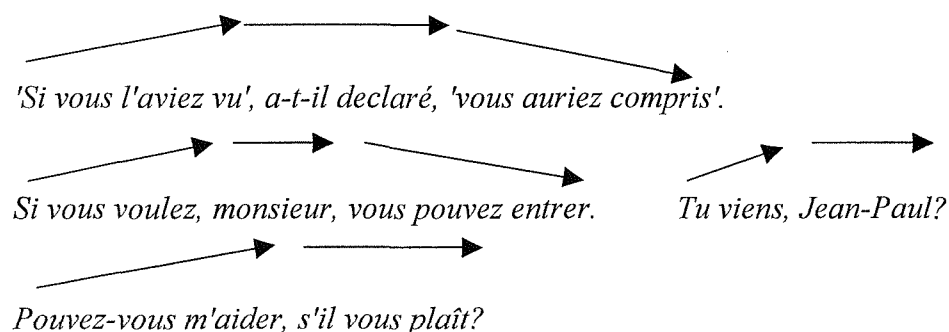
Most of these patterns are similar to the intonation system of English, although Bras (1975: 28) suggests that degrees of rise and fall are more contrasted in French than in

English and Walter (1987: 45) proposes that "movements in French tend to be step-like and avoid glides".

The most significant difference is in yes/no questions where the French maintains the word order of the declarative sentence and indicates that a question is being asked by the rising tone.

Tu l'as vu?   *Have you seen him?*

2.4.3 Linking/Enchaînement

Elision

Elision occurs in French when a phoneme which would usually be pronounced in a word in isolation is not pronounced in connected speech. This usually occurs with the phoneme /ə/, although there are a small number of other examples. In normal speech an internal /ə/ is not pronounced

maintenant   /mɛ̃tnɑ̃/

In the first syllable of a word in isolation /ə/ is usually pronounced

demain   /dəmɛ̃/

but if the word is internal to a rhythm group in normal connected speech, then /ə/ will usually be elided

à demain   /admɛ̃/

Elision also exists in English connected speech, often in consonant clusters at the ends of syllables or with the vowel /ə/

facts /fæks/   *police* /pliːs/

Liaison

Put most simply, liaison consists in the pronunciation of written forms in connected speech which would not otherwise be pronounced if the word appeared in isolation.

petit   /pəti/   but   *un petit enfant*   /œ̃ ptit ɑ̃fɑ̃/

In a small number of cases, liaison involves changing the value of a phoneme

dix   /dis/   dix livres   /di livR/   dix ans   /dizɑ̃/

For liaison to take place it is a necessary condition that a consonant in word-final position is followed by a vowel in word-initial position (as in the examples above). However, whilst this is a necessary condition it is not a sufficient condition: liaison is not universal. The rules for liaison are in fact extremely complex. Broadly speaking, there are three categories: obligatory liaison; optional liaison; and forbidden liaison. In the first case, the liaison is automatically made by the vast majority of French speakers; in the second case liaison tends to be made in more formal speech; in the final case liaison is never made although the written form of the language has the same forms (i.e. consonant-final/vowel-initial) as in the obligatory and optional liaisons. Lists of the "rules" for applying liaison can be found many of the descriptions of French phonology, for example, Price (1991: 137- 44), Battye and Hintze (1992: 138-41), Nott (1998: 64-5).

Liaison also exists in English after a fashion, but it is more a descriptive feature of rapid connected speech rather than a defined and universally recognised system, with its own formal rules of application. Thus although there is a type of liaison in *Far East* (/fɑːriːst/) and *might earn* (/maitɜːn/) , this is quite different from the liaison of French.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the principal features of French phonology against which learner pronunciation is to be measured in order to judge its intelligibility and acceptability. Segmental and suprasegmental features have been described and, in

some instances, compared to the phonology of English. Armed with this background information we are in a better position to evaluate the challenges facing learners. In the next chapter I will look at the existing literature which has either considered directly, or has direct relevance to, the learning of French phonology by English-speaking adults.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In this review I will address a number of important questions relating to the present research through an examination of the relevant literature. How have present attitudes to learning and teaching pronunciation been formed? What stated goals are there for learners and teachers in respect of pronunciation and what criteria exist for measuring the achievement of these goals? How is pronunciation learning and teaching situated within broader issues of applied linguistics? What does the existing literature on the learning and teaching of French phonology by and to English-speaking learners suggest should be the priorities?

3.2 Pronunciation Learning and Teaching: the historical background

Not much is known about attitudes to pronunciation in foreign language teaching before the introduction of printing in 1476. The earliest extant manuscript for the teaching of French in England is *La manière de langage qui t'enseignera bien à droit parler et escrire doulz françois*, written in 1396 (cited in Howatt 1984: 3). This is a collection of useful everyday dialogues for travellers to France and can be seen as a forerunner of what we would nowadays describe as a situational syllabus. However, it has little to say directly about pronunciation.

The earliest records of a systematic approach to the teaching of French pronunciation to English speaking learners are the works of Claudius Holyband, a late sixteenth century French teacher. According to Howatt (1984: 24): "The text was read aloud and repeated until the pupils had a thorough grasp of the pronunciation...A good pronunciation was one of Holyband's chief aims and his main justification for charging high fees as a native- speaker teacher. Next the children practised the text in writing." In his language teaching books Holyband used a lightly reformed spelling to try to reflect the sounds of French. In addition, he published a study of French phonology.

Throughout the seventeenth century pronunciation continued to be at the centre of foreign language teaching in textbooks such as Miège's *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre l'anglais* (1685, cited in Howatt 1984: 54).

By the late eighteenth century the focus had shifted to attempts to "fix" language in books such as Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). In 1791 Walker published what may be the first contrastive phonological analysis of English and French in the "Directions to foreigners" section of his *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*, concentrating on the problems of francophone learners of English such as the sounds /ð/, /θ/, diphthong vowels and stress within words.

The nineteenth century saw a massive expansion in school education for the sons of the emerging bourgeoisie in Europe, particularly in Britain and Prussia. French was widely taught in the British public school system but the favoured grammar-translation methodology emphasised linguistic description using the linguistic categories of Latin with little or no time devoted to work on pronunciation (Howatt 1984, chapter 11).

By the end of the nineteenth century a reaction developed to the grammar-translation method's concentration on literary text and linguistic description to the detriment of oral language skills. At a theoretical level this was expressed by a "reform movement", associated with figures such as Viëtor (Germany), Passy (France), Jesperson (Denmark) and Sweet (Britain). According to Howatt (1984: 172): "To writers like Viëtor and Sweet, it was essential that pronunciation should be correct before moving on to texts, and that these texts should be printed in a scientifically accurate notation". This last is a reference to phonetic transcription which was propagated through the journal *Le Maître Phonétique*, founded in 1889, and the International Phonetic Association (IPA), which took its present name in 1897, although it was preceded by various organisations with the same goals. The ideas of the IPA had some influence at the level of language teaching. According to Grauberg (1997: 141) a survey of schemes of work in a sample of eight English schools in 1912 showed that the first texts in French were all published in phonetic transcription. However, inadequate training of teachers in phonetics and apparent confusion among

pupils gradually dimmed the enthusiasm for phonetics in schools.

The attempt by the theoreticians of the IPA to reassert the central role of pronunciation in language learning and teaching was paralleled at a practical level in the foundation of language schools in the United States using what was to become known as the Direct Method. Sauveur and Heness opened a school in Boston in 1869 for the teaching of French and German and in 1878 Maximilian Berlitz founded his school in Rhode Island .

The Berlitz school emphasised oral communication in German and French with translation "prohibited" and no explicit teaching of grammar. A good standard of pronunciation was to be achieved by the learner listening to and imitating the native speaker teacher without any necessary conscious knowledge of the physical articulation of the sounds of the target language or their relation to orthography.

The influence of this approach can still be found in language teaching manuals in the 1960s. Rivers (1964: 160), for example, proposes that teachers should see to it, especially in the early stages, that learners do not read any material which they have not previously been taught to pronounce, unless such material is read aloud to them by the teacher while they are reading it.

However, both the "theoretical" and "practical" exponents of "reform" demonstrated weaknesses in the teaching of pronunciation. Academics such as Sweet were unable to develop a methodology for any but the most committed learners with the time and inclination to learn phonetic transcription which, he argued should be used "almost indefintely in the teaching of orthographically irregular languages like English and French" (Sweet 1899, cited in Howatt 1984: 178). Berlitz, on the other hand, with his rejection of the need for conscious linguistic analysis by the learner, was unable to offer a systematic approach for teaching and learning pronunciation which went beyond imitation of the teacher by the learner.

Guimbretière (1994: 48) argues that although the reform and direct method movements started from a common position on the primacy of spoken language and the importance of a high standard of pronunciation, their different ideas about how

this goal could be achieved were at the root of two opposed methodologies of pronunciation teaching which underlay conscious attempts to teach pronunciation throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The emphasis of the reform movement on a high level of conscious understanding of how individual phonemes are articulated fitted approaches to language teaching which stressed the importance of declarative knowledge about language. On the other hand, the auditory basis of the direct method relied on a mechanical "listen and repeat" strategy in order to develop procedural competence. With the popularisation of the phonograph this opened the way for an approach which was mechanical in a literal as well as metaphorical sense.

Berlitz's methodology had some success in private language schools for adults and the "reform movement" generated further academic study of phonology. However within much "mainstream" language learning, particularly in the public and grammar school systems, grammar-translation methods, emphasising the written features of language continued to dominate until the middle of the twentieth century.

Following the Second World War theories of second language acquisition were increasingly influenced by behaviourist psychology, of which the best known proponent was B.F. Skinner with his book *Verbal Behaviour* (1957). The behaviourist thesis, which was mirrored pedagogically in the Audio-Lingual approach to second language teaching and learning, was that, like other forms of human behaviour, foreign language learning was a process of habit formation in which the main components are imitation, reinforcement, repetition and ultimately conditioning into the habits of the new language. The key teaching and learning method was intensive drilling. This anaysis and conclusion was applied to all language systems, including pronunciation.

At around the same time, Lado (1957) and others began to develop theories of what became known as Contrastive Analysis. Lado summed up his view of language learning in the formula: "Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult" (Lado 1957: 2). The implication for pronunciation teaching was that it is possible by a contrastive phonological analysis of the first and second languages to predict the items which will

cause the learner difficulty and to overcome the "interference" of the learner's first language by intensive repetition and drills to establish the necessary new habits.

Ironically, it was just as these ideas were beginning to filter through into the teaching of French in British schools (and many education authorities were investing large sums of money in language laboratories) that the theories of behaviourism, contrastive analysis and audio-lingualism began to come in for sustained criticism. Starting in 1959, Chomsky challenged Skinner's psychological and linguistic theories, Richards (1971) and Dulay and Burt (1973) attacked the value of contrastive analysis and applied linguists such as Hymes (1972) and Widdowson (1972 and 1978) began to develop what became known as the Communicative Approach, focusing on the social use of the second language rather than either the learner's knowledge about its formal features (grammar-translation) or his/her ability to correctly reproduce decontextualised language forms through habit formation (audio-lingualism). These developments were reflected in theoretical overviews of the teaching of French as a foreign language by writers such as Galisson (1980).

Paradoxically, since one might imagine that an approach emphasising oral communication would put pronunciation at the forefront of its concerns, the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s saw little investigation into pronunciation learning and teaching. Richards (1978: 2) pointed out that "Interlanguage phonology has not received the same degree of attention as the syntactic features of interlanguage, partly because the current theoretical reorientation within linguistics and developmental psycholinguistics has focused largely on syntax." This point was developed at greater length by Tarone (1978) in one of the very few attempts to situate second language phonology in the interlanguage framework developed by Selinker (1972).

The same processes were at work within French language studies within the field. Guimbretière suggests that "au cours de la décennie 70" pronunciation became "**la grande oubliée** de la didactique des langues" (1994: 49, bold in original).

In addition to the effects of the theoretical reorientation mentioned by Richards, the shortage of serious studies of pronunciation in second language teaching and learning

had roots within a reaction to the pedagogical methods of the structural/audio-lingual approach. As we have seen, pronunciation, albeit often centred on segmental features and taught and learned in isolation from meaningful and contextualised use, had been a key feature of the audio-lingual method. In the absence of a specific communicative pedagogical approach, pronunciation tended to lose its central position in the concerns of authors of teaching materials.

Writing towards the end of this period, Pennington and Richards argued that

> Pronunciation, traditionally viewed as a component of linguistic rather than communicative competence or as an aspect of accuracy rather than conversational fluency, has come to be regarded as of limited importance in a communicatively oriented curriculum (1986, 207.)

The same conclusion was drawn by Champagne (1984) in her study of French as a Second Language instruction programmes and materials.

From the late 1980s onwards the situation began to change again. An increasing number of studies sought to reassert the position of phonology within second language acquisition theories (for example, James and Leather, eds., 1987; Ioup and Weinberger, 1987; and James, 1989), locating pronunciation at the centre of debates such as whether there is a "critical age", whether phonological development follows a "natural" progression and the role played by the learner's first language.

In the field of English as a second/foreign language, important pedagogical questions were addressed by authors such as Kenworthy (1987); Brown (1992); Underhill (1994); and Morley (1994), who all sought to situate pronunciation teaching and learning within a broadly communicative framework. At the same time, a new generation of teaching and learning materials for English pronunciation began to appear of which the *Headway* series are perhaps the best known (Cunningham and Bowler, 1990; Bowler and Cunningham, 1991; and Bowler and Parminter, 1992), along with Hancock (1995) and Bowen and Marks (1992).

In the French context, there was an increased interest in second language phonology, (for example, Callamand, 1981; Galazzi-Matasci and Pedoya- Guimbretière, 1983;

Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière, 1989; and Guimbretière, 1994). Interestingly, given the widespread assumption within many anglophone language teaching circles, that developments within the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) are invariably in advance of the methodology of the teaching of other languages, the chronology of these publications suggests that French language teaching certainly did not lag behind its English language counterpart.

Insofar as the literature of the 1990s has a common foundation, it can be summarised as follows. First, a stated desire to combine, using Guimbretière's terminolgy (Guimbretière, 1994), *savoir* ("knowledge about") and *savoir faire* ("use of") the phonological systems of the target language, rather than the *either/or* approaches of earlier methodologies. Secondly, a conscious eclecticism in proposed activity types for teachers and learners. The notion that there is a "God's Truth" explanation and methodology for teaching and learning pronunciation appears to have very little currency at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, Nunan (1995: 115) states that "pronunciation is a neglected skill in many classrooms, despite the obvious importance attached to it by learners" and my own practical experience within post-compulsory language teaching tends to bear this out. The question that is posed, then, is to what extent actual classroom practice reflects developments in language teaching research and publishing.

3.3 Goals and Criteria for Pronunciation Learning and Teaching

Any study of pronunciation learning and teaching requires us first to define what are the learner's and teacher's goals and what are the criteria by which we can measure whether these goals have been met.

While some adult language learners may say that their goal is to pronounce the target language like a native speaker, many teachers would consider this an inappropriate goal for the majority of their learners.

There are likely to be a range of different reasons for studying. Arthur and Hurd (1992: 7) report the following reasons given for learning a foreign language (not necessarily French) by 473 adult students in Lancashire:

- 80% - "holidays"
- 61% - "to keep their minds alert"
- 26% - "a pleasant evening out"
- 24% - "interested in qualifications"
- 23% - "work reasons"
- 23% - "friends or relatives speaking the language"

It does not seem that most of these groups would derive any particular practical benefit from acquiring a native-like pronunciation.

In contexts where a foreign language is being learned for a specific vocational purpose, a (near) native-like accent may be necessary. This may be because of a need to approach native speakers on equal terms, because safety issues are involved (e.g. airline pilots) or because opportunities for repetition and second tries may be limited (e.g. international telephone operators). For learners living, or intending to live, in a country where the target language is spoken a strong "foreign accent" may act as a barrier to obtaining employment or acceptance in particular social circles due to intolerance by some native speakers. However, the pronunciation goals of these types of learners fall outside the orbit of most adult learners of foreign languages and will therefore be treated as a special case and not considered further here.

If we examine the stated language needs of most adult learners, it would appear that *intelligibility* is a more realistic goal. Indeed, as early as 1949, Abercrombie argued that most "language learners need no more than a comfortably intelligible pronunciation" (p. 120). But what is meant by intelligibility? One solution is to say that "intelligibilty"= "understandability". However, this is merely substituting one word for another and we would then have to define understandabilty. Kenworthy (1987) suggests a more operational definition:

'The more words a listener is able to identify accurately when said by a particular speaker, the more intelligible that speaker is.' Since words are made up of sounds, it seems that what we are talking about is the issue of equivalence of sounds. If the foreign speaker substitutes one sound or feature of pronunciation for another, and the result is that the listener hears a different word or phrase from the one the speaker was aiming to say, we say that the foreigner's speech is unintelligible. Likewise, if the foreign speaker substitutes a sound in a particular word, but that word is nonetheless understood, then we say the speech is intelligible. (Kenworthy 1987: 13).

In this working definition of the goal of pronunciation learning, what matters is that the features of the learner's pronunciation are "good-enough". That is to say that although the learner's pronunciation may not be the same as that of a native-speaker it is close enough for the listener to match the feature with that which a native- speaker would use.

Munro and Derwing (1999) argue that we should not confuse intelligibility with "foreign accentedness". Their research suggested that whilst strength of foreign accent, judged "globally", is *related to* intelligibility, measured by comprehension of non-native speaker utterances, it is not an *identical* dimension. Certain language learners may be considered to have a strong foreign accent, but their speech is nonetheless broadly intelligible. Other learners, whose speech is considered to be less accented may in fact be less intelligible in terms of a native speaker's ability to repeat or transcribe their utterances.

Brown (1992a: 4) following Smith and Nelson (1985) characterises *intelligibility* as: "the low-level oral/aural recognition of words and utterances". He adds the further concepts of *comprehensibility* and *interpretability* as descriptions of the locutionary and illocutionary force of spoken utterances. However, it seems to me that these latter two concepts may be as much a function of listener-conditions as of the speaker's pronunciation. To adapt an example given by Kenworthy (1987: 16): someone stands up in a crowded cinema and shouts a word or words that no one understands; the person is obviously very agitated, and is pointing towards an open door; smoke and the smell of something burning waft through the door; everyone immediately makes for the fire exits. The foreigner's utterance has been comprehensible and interpretable, in Brown's sense, without being intelligible. So while Brown's distinction may be valid at a descriptive level of what may happen in certain communicative situations, it

is not necessarily very helpful in defining the goals or criteria for pronunciation teaching and learning.

Two further factors may exist in determining the goals of pronunciation learning and teaching. A common formula (for example, Kenworthy, 1987) is that the speech of the learner should be *comfortably* intelligible. If a foreigner's speech is intelligible in the most basic sense described above, it may nevertheless require considerable effort (and perhaps frequent requests for repetition) on the part of the listener for successful understanding to occur. Most people realise that when we listen to a foreigner speaking our native language we may have to work a little harder to understand than would normally be the case. However, if the effort demanded is too great, then the listener may become impatient and unwilling to continue with the interaction. As Kenworthy concludes: "In setting goals for our learners we must consider the effect of mispronunciation on the listener and the degree of tolerance listeners will have for this." (Kenworthy 1987: 4).

A final element in setting goals for learners is the matter of the *social acceptability* of the foreigner's pronunciation. Certain features of pronunciation, in particular intonation, may convey an unintended attitude (e.g. abruptness) on the part of the learner-speaker. Thus, in addition to being comfortably intelligible, learners must aim in their pronunciation for what Nott describes as "a style appropriate to the subject and the occasion, through avoidance of errors affecting adversely the listener's attitude to the speaker" (Nott 1994: 16).

Carruthers (1987: 192) combines the notions of *comfortable* and *socially acceptable* intelligibility:

> A truly acceptable pronunciation is one which allows the listener to understand the content of a message without being distracted by its form. For this reason, it is often useful to work ...with students whose accents, although easily comprehensible, irritate the listener and may cause the students embarrassment or ridicule.

In the rest of this text my use of "comprehensible" and "intelligible" treats the two words as synonyms and is intended to include all of the relevant features mentioned in the foregoing discussion.

3.4 Applied linguistics and the acquisition of L2 phonology

Although, as I noted earlier, audio-lingual theories of L2 pronunciation learning and teaching were widely held to have been discredited from the 1970s onwards, an associated approach, that of contrastive analysis, has continued to be influential on many teachers and course material writers.

Contrastive analysis may be applied to any language system - phonology, structure and lexis. James (1980: 3) defines it as "a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted (i.e. contrastive, not comparative) two-valued typologies (a CA is always concerned with a *pair* of languages)".

Historically, contrastive analysis was rooted in behaviourist theories of psychology and their application to language learning. If language consists of habit formation, and second language learning involves the learning of new habits, then it was thought that it would follow automatically that the areas of greatest difficulty for the learner would be where the contrasts between the habits of the first and second languages were greatest. A contrastive analysis of the "habits" of the two languages would allow for the prediction of these points thereby enabling teachers and materials writers to focus on these points. Writers like Stockwell et al. (1965), cited in Littlewood (1984: 18-19) and Wardhaugh (1970) proposed that there was a "hierarchy" of difficulty based on the extent of the difference between the two languages.

The value of contrastive analysis as a tool for predicting areas and degrees of difficulty was increasingly challenged throughout the 1970s. The notion of "interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972) as a description of the learner's knowledge and use of the second language at any given point in the learning process was widely adopted and errors were seen as being "developmental" rather than the result of simple transfers of first language habits. A "middle position" was taken by researchers such as Major (1987) who proposed that "natural development" and "interference" both played a role in the acquisition of L2 phonology, with interference processes predominant in the early stages, when the learner was most heavily influenced by his/her existing language knowledge and practice, while developmental processes became more prominent as the influence of the L1 decreased.

Whitman and Jackson (1972), cited in Littlewood (1984: 20), considering Japanese learners of English, concluded that contrastive analysis was of little use in predicting the items which proved difficult in their tests. Flege (1986) argued that, contrary to the notion that the degree of difference determines the degree of difficulty, in fact, learners have more problems with sounds that are similar, but slightly different, to those in their first language than with sounds which are completely different.

Kenworthy, whilst arguing strongly for the influence of the first language on the learner's pronunciation of the second language, also recognised other influences, such as age, the amount of exposure to the second language, phonetic ability, attitude and identity and motivation and concern for good pronunciation (Kenworthy 1987: 4-8).

Nevertheless, aspects of contrastive analysis continued to be popular amongst many practising language teachers. At a "common sense" level it was argued that if first-language phonology had no influence on the acquisition of second language pronunciation, how could we explain the existence of typical "foreign accents" in learners' speech even at advanced levels? Moreover, this intuitive view was backed up by Ioup's research (1984), showing that native speakers of English could reliably identify learners from the same language background by their pronunciation. Writers such as Swan and Smith et al. (1987) produced whole books (which were and are widely used by teachers) describing "typical" mistakes of learners of English from different first-language backgrounds. Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991) introduce each unit of their book with a section on typical pronunciation problems for different first-language learners of French.

Towards the end of the 1980s Odlin (1989, chapter seven) argued that an overview of the research to date suggested that the evidence for the influence of the first-language phonological system on acquisition of second-language pronunciation was in fact quite strong. Where Odlin differed from the earlier versions of contrastive analysis was in accepting that whilst the phonology of the first language is an influence on the acquisition of second language pronunciation, it is not the *only* influence.

Nunan (1995), following Odlin, proposes that:

> The research and theory presented so far suggests that the learner's first
> language will have a strong influence on L2 pronunciation, but there may also
> be developmental sequences akin to those for morphosyntax which may be
> impervious to instruction. (Nunan 1995: 106)

It should also be noted that whereas much of the early contrastive analysis
concentrated on phonemes, later work such as Wenk (1986) and De Bot (1986)
acknowledged the crucial importance of suprasegmental features such as rhythm and
intonation. The present research will attempt to consider both areas in respect of the
phonology of French

Recent research and theorisation seems to leave us with a weakened version of the
contrastive analysis thesis. The claim that contrastive analysis can reliably predict
types and degrees of difficulty for all learners is not supported by the evidence.
Difference does not always equal difficulty. The former is a linguistic description,
whereas the latter involves complex psychological, sociological and physical factors
along with a broader general understanding of the process of second language
acquisition and the role of the learning environment.

Yet contrastive analysis does appear to help to explain some of the characteristics of
learner pronunciation once this has actually been observed. This understanding can
then be used as one factor, amongst others, in devising learning programmes.

It can also be argued that an "explanatory" contrastive phonological analysis will be
helpful to learners. Unless they possess exceptional phonetic aptitude, learners will
often find it difficult to "mimic" native speakers' pronunciation. Acquisition of the
phonology of the target language may be made easier if the learner's attention is
drawn to a systematic analysis of it. MacCarthy (1975: 1-2) describes this as an
approach based on "understanding **and** practice", "establishing some kind of
framework within which to fit the mass of detail". For most learners not trained in
phonetics or phonology this will almost certainly involve a description of the target
language compared to, and contrasted with, the learner's own first language.

Following this theme, in the next section I will examine how a number of writers have attempted to use descriptions of French and English as the basis for predicting the difficulties likely to be encountered by English speaking adult learners of French.

3.5 French Pronunciation and Anglophone Learners:

Much of the writing on teaching and learning pronunciation from the late 1980s onwards has stressed the importance of suprasegmental features, such as word stress, rhythm and intonation, as compared to the articulation of individual phonemes (Brown 1992 and 1995; Haycraft, 1992).

Ross (1992: 443) goes so far as to argue that "Contemporary pronunciation theory has discounted the primacy of the phonemic segment as the building block of a pronunciation syllabus and replaced it with the suprasegmental elements such as pitch, tone and stress." Anderson-Hsieh et al. (1992) claim that their research into native speaker judgements of learner pronunciation indicates that "deviance in suprasegmentals, prosody and syllable structure have a much greater effect on comprehensibility and acceptability than do mispronunciations of individual phonemes".

Interestingly, this position is present in several texts specifically discussing French pronunciation which date from an earlier period. Callamand (1981: 6), in general, and Pritchard (1985), with specific reference to intonation, both make a similar point to that described above. The present research will consider whether this is true in relation to the pronunciation of French by adult English speaking learners.

Before proceeding further, it is useful to mention that much of the writing on the subject fails to distinguish between difficulty of acquisition of features of the target language's phonological system and the importance of deviance from particular features of that system in terms of the comprehensibility and acceptability of learner pronunciation. This is an important distinction: a particular phoneme may be very difficult for learners to articulate accurately, but the mispronunciation may have little effect on the comprehensibility of the learner's speech overall. For example, French-speaking learners of English find it difficult to pronounce the phonemes /θ/ and /ð/,

but is there any evidence that this causes their speech to be unintelligible? The same might be true for anglophone learners of French in respect of certain French phonemes. A hierarchy of difficulty of acquisition would not necessarily be identical to a hierarchy of gravity of error.

Within the literature, although all of the authors mentioned have something to say about segmental *and* suprasegmental features, some writers emphasise the importance of the former whilst others concentrate on the latter. A second distinction is between those writers who suggest hierarchies of difficulty and/or gravity of error and those who simply list problem areas with no explicit comment on comparative difficulty of acquisition or importance for comprehensibility.

For reasons of time and space it is obviously not possible to consider everything that has been written about anglophone learners' difficulties with French phonology. In the following paragraphs I will consider the views of a range of authors from each decade of the second half of the twentieth century in an attempt to provide an overview of different viewpoints. The present research may confirm or deny, in whole or in part, some or all of these viewpoints.

Delattre (1951) emphasises the fundamental difference between the open syllabification of French and the closed syllabification of English, that is to say the tendency of French syllables to end with a vowel and English syllables to end with a consonant. The same writer (1965) using a random sample of 3, 000 French and English syllables found that 76 per cent of the former were open compared to only 40 per cent. of the latter. The same point is made by Léon (1996).

For Tranel (1987: 67) the tendency of English-speaking learners to transfer the closed syllabification of their native language to French will inevitably compound the problem caused by the non-articulation in French of word-final consonants which are "spelled but not sounded".

In addition to the problems arising from the different syllabification patterns of the two languages, Delattre concentrates on the global differences between the two languages' articulatory habits, contrasting the *tension*, *antériorité* and *croissance* of

French with the *relâchement, postériorité* and *décroissance* of English. Rather than starting from a comparison and contrast of individual phonemes, Delattre proposes that it is the overarching phonological differences between the two systems which explain the problems encountered with certain sounds.

MacCarthy (1975) also focuses on the importance of the syllable as a source of difficulty for Anglophone learners but with a very different focus, that of the syllable timing of French contrasted to the stress timing of English. This position (discussed above in chapter two) holds that syllable timed languages (such as French) give an equal value to each syllable in an utterance, or as Abercrombie (1967: 98) puts it "there is a constant rate of syllable succession". In stress timed languages (such as English), on the other hand, it is the stressed syllables which follow each other at regular intervals regardless of how many unstressed syllables come in between. Tranel (1987: 35) agrees with this position, arguing that "the stress-timed rhythm of English and the syllable-timed rhythm of French are absolutely fundamental characteristics separating the two languages."

As already discussed in chapter two, Wenk and Wioland (1982) challenge the whole notion of French as a syllable timed language, arguing that given that the final syllable in a rhythm (or sense) group in French is stressed, it is more accurate to describe English as "leader-timed" and French as "trailer-timed". Without taking a position here on the relative merits of the two descriptions, it is relevant to note that Wenk and Wioland accept the difference in rhythmic patterns between the two languages and recognise that this is likely to pose a significant problem for learners.

Indeed, for MacCarthy this difference is *the* biggest challenge for anglophone learners of French:

> It is probably more worth while for the English learner of French to attend to syllable timing than to any other single feature: even if an acceptable articulation of each individual vowel and consonant of the foreign language has been acquired, the English person will not give the impression of pronouncing French really well...so long as he still carries the stress timing of English over into sequences of French sounds. (1975: 10)

This point could be taken further. If suprasegmental features of second language pronunciation are poor, it could be that acceptable articulation of individual phonemes

is not only not enough to "give the impression of pronouncing French really well", but the learner's speech may actually be unintelligible.

Bras (1975) also talks at length about the importance of open syllabification and the regularity of French rhythm patterns as challenges to anglophone learners. Curiously, however, her practical guidance to learners concentrates on the production of individual phonemes. Within this area she does not suggest any hierarchy of articulatory difficulty or gravity of error, other than to suggest that the phonemes /a/, /ə/, /v/, /f/, /z/ and /s/ "should present little difficulty".

Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière (1991) also indicate phonemes which they consider pose particular problems for anglophone learners, once again without suggesting any particular hierarchy of degrees of difficulty or seriousness of mispronunciation. For them, the highlighted problems are: confusion of /y/ and /u/, (*tu* and *tout*); diphthongisation of /e/ (*marché*), /ɛ/ (*chèvre*) and /o/ (*chaud*); confusion of /ɑ̃/(*banc*) /ɔ̃/ (*bon*); confusion of /ɥ/ (*lui*) and /w/ (*Louis*), aspiration of /t/, (*thé*), /p/ (*pain*) and /k/ (*quai*); pronunciation of /ʒ/ as /dʒ/ (*jaune*); and mispronunciation of /R/ (*rouge*) as a result of the non-existence of the sound in English.

In addition to emphasising the importance of the different roles of the syllable in French and English, Grauberg (1997) also homes in on the difficulty for learners of sounds with no English equivalent, particularly the front-rounded vowels /y/, /ø/, /œ/ and /ə/, the nasal vowels /ɑ̃/, /ɛ̃/, /œ̃/ and /ɔ̃/ and the consonants /ŋ/ and /R/. Although why Grauberg includes /ŋ/ is not altogether clear, as a very similar sound exists in English.

Whereas much of the literature concentrates on the difficulties caused by phonemes with no English equivalent, Valdman (1976: 37) proposes a quite different analysis. For him:

> ...problems will be encountered with French phonemes that have English counterparts rather than with "new" phonemes. The problems are due in most

instances to differences in the distribution or in the phonemic realisation of matching phonemes.

Valdman also suggests (page 84) that particular problems may occur as a result of English-speaking learners imposing English word stress patterns on French cognates (for example, *bagage, avril, électricité*).

In concluding this section, it should be restated that the views of the writers cited above are not reducible to the specific points I have mentioned. Rather, the issues I have chosen to highlight from each particular text have been selected to give an overview of how the literature to date as a whole has defined and discussed the phonological difficulties facing English-speaking learners of French.

3.6 Conclusions

In this review I have tried to address a number of important questions through an examination of the relevant literature. How have present attitudes to learning and teaching pronunciation been formed? What stated goals are there for learners and teachers and what criteria exist for measuring the achievement of these goals? How is pronunciation learning and teaching situated within broader issues of applied linguistics? What does the existing literature on the learning and teaching of French phonology by and to English-speaking learners suggest should be the priorities?

These questions, and the answers to them contained in the literature review, provide the essential background to the issues I wish to address. How do the views of "practitioners", both learners and teachers, compare to the views of the "experts" who have written on the question of the acquisition of French phonology by English-speaking learners? Can further analysis of learner pronunciation throw more light on whether the actual problems correspond to the perceived difficulties? Finally, could practice be changed to offer more effective solutions in learning and teaching contexts?

In the next chapter I will consider how some of the course materials in current use in British educational institutions deal with these issues.

Chapter Four

Teaching and Learning French Pronunciation: course materials

4.1 Introduction

To what extent are the preoccupations of applied linguistics reflected in the practical materials in current use for teaching and learning French pronunciation? In this chapter my aim is to establish the phonological priorities of various materials and to consider how they relate to the issues raised in the preceding chapter. My own research may either confirm or refute the presuppositions (explicit or implicit) underlying published course materials that aim to teach French pronunciation.

The materials evaluated include many of those currently in use by teachers of French to British adult learners. Most of these courses are produced by British publishers. I will also consider a number of courses produced by French publishers as *Français Langue Etrangère* manuals. These materials are not intended for learners from any specific first-language background. Courses are considered for the full range of levels of learner, from "zero beginners" to "advanced" (in the sense of the English GCE A-level system).

For reasons of clarity and brevity, the materials will be referred to by their title rather than the author/date system. In order to facilitate use of the bibliography, author/date details of the materials referred to are given below.

A vous la France (Page 1984)
Café Crème (Kaneman-Pougatch et al. 1997)
Décollage (McEwan, Picard and Smith 1989)
Le français en gros plans (Birks, Udris and O'Neil 1998)
France Extra (Moys 1985)
The French Experience (Bougard and Bourdais 1994)
The French Experience 2 (Garnier and Picard 1996)
New Breakthrough French (Rybak 1996)
Le Nouvel Espaces 3 (Capelle, Guidon and Molinié 1996)
Nouvelles Perspectives: Découvertes (Carter et al. 1998)
Nouvelles Perspectives: Repères (Carter et al. 1998)
Objectif Bac 1 (Pillette and Clarke 1999)
Objectif Bac 2 (Pillette and Graham 1999)
Panorama 1 (Girardet and Cridlig 1996)
Panorama 2 (Girardet and Cridlig 1996)
Plaisir des sons (Kaneman-Pougatch and Pedoya-Guimbretière 1991)
Signe du temps: vécu (Corless and Gaskell 1986)

4.2.1 British publishers: beginners to elementary levels

A vous la France deals with pronunciation mainly in a "pronunciation guide" at the back of the book, although there are some comments on aspects of French phonology which differ from English in the main text. The cassettes accompanying the book have a section described as "pronunciation" for each unit, but these are model pronunciations of key vocabulary rather than any systematic work on specific features of French phonology.

The pronunciation guide focuses mainly on individual sounds. There are explanations of vowels, semi-vowels and consonants, but not all French phonemes are included. The emphasis is on phonemes which do not exist in English or sounds which have a different representation in French spelling to that of English orthography. Consonants such as /b/ and /p/ which are very similar but slightly different to their English equivalents are not mentioned.

Nasal vowels are explained at some length on the basis that they do not exist in English and are therefore anticipated to be an area of particular difficulty.

Interrogative intonation and liaison are dealt with fairly thoroughly in the main text and pronunciation guide respectively. The difference between English word stress and French is explained in a single sentence; rhythm group stress in French is not mentioned.

The methodology of *A vous la France* is to explain French pronunciation by comparison and contrast to English and neither the book nor the cassettes provide systematic practice activities.

It is notoriously difficult to describe the sounds of one language in terms of another one. The same letter can represent different sounds in different languages. Sometimes a particular sound is very close but not exactly the same in two languages.

The following is intended as a brief guide to the sounds of French. It is no substitute for listening carefully to French speakers, trying to copy the sounds you hear, and asking them to correct your pronunciation.

When reading it, it is worth bearing in mind that:
very often a single sound is conveyed by a variety of different spellings eg *maison* is pronounced the same as *maisons*, and *parlais*, *parlait* and *parlaient* all sound exactly the same
accents can vary as much from one region to another as they can in Britain.
no French word sounds exactly like an English one even if it looks exactly the same. This can mean that words familiar enough when written down may be completely unrecognisable when spoken.
unlike English words, French words do not bear a heavy stress on one of their syllables. For instance, in the English word 'orange' the stress is quite clearly put on the first syllable. In the French word *orange* equal stress is given to both syllables.

Extract 4.1 *A vous la France*, p. 302

è/ê   as in 2 above
        père   mère   bière   honnête

é   similar to è above but with the mouth rather more closed
        café   pâté   thé   Méditerranée   vélo

i   not like English 'i' in 'bit' or 'bite': closer to the 'i' in 'police'
        ici   Paris   merci   piscine

o   1   as in 'odd'
        Ecosse   olive   Grenoble   professeur
        2   at the end of a word and with a circumflex accent (ô) the sound is
        slightly different
        vélo   auto   hôtel   allô

u   a sound not found in English. First say 'oo', but then keeping the lips
        in that position try saying 'ee'
        du   sur   Lucerne

eu   like the vowel sounds in the words 'spur' or 'sir' in English
        heure   vapeur   peu   deux

        NB *eu* (past participle of *avoir*) is pronounced as if it were a single 'u'

ou   like the 'o' in English 'who' (never like 'loud')
        où   vous   voulez   mousse

oi   like the 'wa' sound at the start of southern English 'one'
        moi   trois   boîte   poisson

au/eau as in type 2 of 'o' above
        château   beau   autoroute   originaux

        Nasals
        These are sounds that don't have exact equivalents in English, and the
        best thing is to listen to the pronunciation section of the cassettes or
        records and copy them.

in/im/ain   to get a rough idea of the sound required, say southern English 'van'
        but at the last moment stop the top of your tongue from touching the
        roof of your mouth. The sound you make should be similar to French
        'vin'.
        Ain   pain   prochain   train   impossible   insecte
        NB The same applies to 'en' when preceded by an 'i'
        chien   bien   rien

en/an   as above, but this time practise with the word 'on' or 'don'
        restaurant   dans   France   entrée   pense   centre

Extract 4.2 *A vous la France*, p. 304

The French Experience, also published by the BBC, has replaced *A vous la France* in many (although not all) beginners' classrooms. Its approach to pronunciation is more integrated than in its predecessor. Each unit concludes with a *phonétique* section. Vowels (oral and nasal), semi-vowels and consonants are all considered, both those which do not exist in English and those which have close equivalents. Word and rhythm group stress are explained, as are intonation, liaison and elision. In addition to explanations and examples, each *phonétique* section includes practice activities. The text is closely linked to the audio-cassettes which provide audio-discrimination exercises for individual phonemes and examples of intonation patterns.

PHONÉTIQUE

((·)) Tu ou vous
Listen to the tape/CD and notice the different vowel sounds in *tu* and *vous*.

1 Tick the grid to show which sound you hear in these words.

	like *tu*	like *vous*
du		
une		
Toulouse		
douze		
Etats-Unis		
le Louvre		

2 Practise saying those sounds in these words. Listen and repeat.

du   d'où   tu   tout
un jus d'orange
vous êtes d'où?
salut!

((·))
Elles s'appellent...
The *-ent* ending of verbs is not pronounced.
Listen and repeat.

Elle s'appelle Fatira.
Elles s'appellent Radia et
. Malika.
Pierre habite en France.
Isabelle et Pierre habitent
en France.

Extract 4.3 *French Experience* p. 33

PHONÉTIQUE

((•)) Patrick

In French, the sounds *p*, *t* and *k* are much sharper and clearer than in English: there is no aspiration or breathiness.
Listen carefully, and compare the French and English versions of these words:

Patrick
Coca-Cola
Tati

1 Listen to the following words and repeat them, making sure your *p t k* sounds are clear and not breathy!

tête
cœur
pied
tonton
cuiller
papa

2 Before listening, try pronouncing these words. Beware, they look deceptively close to English words! Then listen and repeat after the tape/CD.

population
parents
conséquence
week-end
température

Note: *th* in French is pronounced *t*.

homéopathie
thermomètre
thé
thon

PHONÉTIQUE

((•)) Intonation

Listen to the rising and falling patterns in the voice when French people speak. There are three main 'rules of thumb' to remember:

● Questions expecting the answer 'yes' or 'no' are usually made with a rising intonation:
Vous aimez voyager?
Est-ce que vous êtes allé en France?
Est-ce que vous allez passer vos vacances en France cette année?

● The voice generally falls during a question asking for specific information:
Est-ce que vous allez en France ou en Allemagne?
Où êtes-vous allé?
Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait?

● In a long sentence, keep your voice up at the end of each phrase, except the final one:
Il y avait des éléphants, des lions, des gnous, des girafes et des tigres.

1 Can you work out the intonation in these sentences? Say them, then check with the tape/CD and repeat.

– Tu as passé de bonnes vacances?
– Non! La plage était sale, l'eau était froide, et l'hôtel était nul!

– Quels pays avez-vous visités?
– La France, l'Italie, l'Espagne et la Suisse.

Extract 4.4 *French Experience* p. 143   Extract 4.5 *French Experience* p. 183

New Breakthrough French includes explanations and activities for suprasegmental features (specifically intonation and word/group stress) as well as items on individual sounds. The latter seem to have been chosen mainly for their contrasts with English phonology: /e/ and /R/ are considered three times, /y/ and nasal vowels twice. /u/ and /i/ are the only other phonemes receiving attention.

This exercise gives you practice at pronouncing the elusive sound 'u', which comes in the word **tu**. On the recording, Carolle will repeat some of Bernadette's directions for getting to Notre Dame. Then Yves will say some other sentences from the conversations which include the sound 'u'. There will be a pause after each group of words for you to repeat them; give particular care to the sound 'u' when you do so.

Extract 4.6 *New Breakthrough French* p. 72

In the early stages of language learning, your speech is inevitably staccato: you ... say ... one ... word ... at ... a ... time. Part of developing fluency is learning to say words in groups, as native speakers do. As a general rule (frequently broken by native speakers), French puts the stress on the final syllable of a word or a group of words. So, for example, in the phrase **au bord de la mer** (beside the sea/at the seaside) it is the word **mer** which should be stressed. There will be more about this in Exercise 9.

Extract 4.7 *New Breakthrough French* p. 219

Taking all three courses together, there are clear differences in approach. *The French Experience* has the most comprehensive coverage and seems to rely the least on an explicit contrastive analysis approach. Suprasegmentals are present, although in *A vous la France* and *New Breakthrough French* they definitely take second place to individual phonemes. Only *The French Experience* considers at any length those individual sounds which are similar yet not identical in French and English (e.g., the consonants /p/, /t/ and /k/).

4.2.2 British publishers: elementary to intermediate levels

The *France Extra* coursebook has only occasional references to pronunciation. However, the cassettes accompanying the book include a pronunciation section after every unit. Features which are given considerable attention include nasal vowels, /R/, /y/ versus /u/ and /e/versus /ɛ/. The semi-vowels /j/, /w/ and /ɥ/ are all treated in some depth, separately and in conjunction with /ø/ and /œ/. Methodology is primarily of the "explanation, listen and repeat" type.

The French Experience 2, which is increasingly replacing *France Extra* in many classes, is unusual in that it contains no explicit activities for pronunciation. Interrogative intonation and elision receive one sentence each in the "language summary" at the end of the book, but otherwise *French Experience 2* is a phonology teaching-free zone! This represents something of an inversion of the situation at beginners-elementary level. In the latter case, the more recent publications tend to deal more thoroughly with phonology. At elementary-intermediate level it is the older publication which has the more systematic treatment of pronunciation.

4.2.3 British publishers: intermediate to advanced levels

The last couple of years have seen the production of a "new generation" of intermediate-advanced level courses. Two of the most popular courses from the 1980s, *Décollage* and *Signes du temps: vécu* had no explicit explanations of or systematic activities for French phonology

Of the "new generation", *Nouvelles Perspectives: Repères* and *Découvertes* continue along the same trajectory as the 1980s courses. *Objectif Bac 1* and *2*, however, have a quite different approach. Most units contain explicit work on French phonology: the main emphasis is on individual sounds, particularly vowels (including nasal and semi-vowels) but suprasegmental features such as differences in word stress and rhythm group stress between French and English and intonation also appear.

discus**sions**   généra**tions**   cons**cient**   pa**tience**   vi**cieux**

B Entraînez-vous à prononcer les mots ci-dessus puis les phrases ci-dessous à l'aide des modèles enregistrés.

Pourquoi toutes ces discus**sions** entre généra**tions**?

Ce manque de cons**cience** profes**sion**nelle me rend sou**cieux**.

Ce cercle vi**cieux** me rend impa**tient**, mon**sieur**.

Cette pas**sion** obses**sion**nelle est sans solu**tion**.

Extract 4.8 *Objectif Bac 1* p. 35

---

a Aidez-vous de la phonétique (voir dictionnaire) pour vous entraîner à prononcer les mots ci-dessous. Vérifiez ensuite à l'aide de la cassette.

cueillir *to pick (flowers)* kœjiʀ	**la chimiothérapie** ʃimjoteʀapi	**une cuillère** kɥijɛʀ
le cholestérol kɔlɛsteʀɔl	**l'apothéose** apɔteoz	**un bulldozer** buldozɛʀ	**un quiproquo** kipʀɔko
squatter skwatœʀ	**un wagon** vagɔ̃	**un quartette** k(w)aʀtɛt	**les waters** watɛʀ

b Soulignez dans les passages ci-dessus les mots ressemblant à l'anglais, recopiez-les chronologiquement et entraînez-vous à les prononcer correctement. Ecoutez ensuite le passage avec uniquement votre liste devant-vous: les reconnaissez-vous tous?

c Essayez d'identifier les sons qui semblent vous causer des problèmes à l'écoute (ex. . . an/in; an/on; in/on; u/ou; t/d; p/b . . .) et concentrez-vous sur un groupe de sons à la fois. Ecoutez un passage de votre choix et, à chaque fois que vous entendez un des sons, interrompez l'enregistrement et essayez de visualiser le mot en question.

Extract 4.9 *Objectif Bac 2*, p. 10

4.2.4 British publishers: conclusions

The overall picture which seems to emerge is of considerable diversity between different authors, publishers and levels in course materials produced in Britain for anglophone learners. Insofar as it is possible to deduce any general trends, there is a tendency to focus on individual phonemes, with less emphasis given to the suprasegmental features of French phonology. Considerable space is devoted to those phonemes which do not exist in English, particularly nasal vowels. In general, those features of French pronunciation which are closer to English, but not identical, (certain consonants, for example) receive much less attention.

All of the beginners courses reviewed devote some space to issues of phonology, although the approaches adopted vary considerably. However, with the exception of the recent *Objectif Bac*, systematic work on pronunciation is virtually absent in the course materials at advanced levels. Teachers working with these groups would have to devise their own materials or look elsewhere for activities on pronunciation.

4.3.1 French publishers: beginners to elementary levels
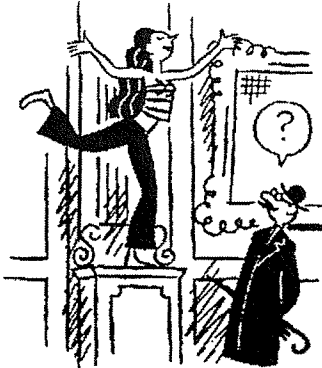
Panorama 1 includes a section on pronunciation in each unit. All of the individual phonemes of French are covered. There is no specifically contrastive phonological syllabus given that the course is not aimed at learners from any single first-language background and no particular individual sound or group of sounds is singled out for special attention. Suprasegmental features are not explicitly touched upon.

The comprehensiveness of the coverage means that all potential problems with individual phonemes are included, although the equality of treatment results in what might be considered a lack of prioritisation.

Les sons [i] - [y] - [u]

1 Écoutez et répétez.

six - su - sous

...

2 Répétez ces questions.

Tu habites à Paris ?

...

3 Écoutez et répétez ce texte.

Dis-moi tout
D'où es-tu ?
– D'Honolulu
Dis-moi tout
Où habites-tu ?
– Dans la rue du musée
Dis-moi tout
Qui es-tu ?
– La Vénus du musée

Extract 4.10 *Panorama 1* p. 19

Le son [j]

Pour chaque cas :
• Écoutez et répétez l'exemple et les trois autres mots.
• Écrivez les trois mots.

1 [ja] → un voyage, ...

2 [je] → une pièce, ...

3 [aj] ou [ɛj] → la taille, ...

4 [ɛj] ou [ij] → la fille, ...

5 voyelle + [j] + voyelle → s'habiller, ...

Extract 4.11 *Panorama 1* p. 111

4.3.2 French publishers: elementary to intermediate levels

Panorama 2 revisits some of the phonemes treated in its predecessor. However, the coverage is not as inclusive and therefore we must conclude that the authors have made certain priorities. Given that the course is not destined for any one learner group, we can assume that the course writers have applied their own criteria although we can only guess at what these might be. Presumably the choices have been made on the basis of the authors' judgement that certain aspects of French phonology, specifically nasal vowels, the vowels /y/, /ø/ and /œ/, the semi-vowel /j/ and /R/, are problematical for learners from all language backgrounds.

Suprasegmental features receive some attention but this is limited to the use of intonation for questions and to express attitudes and emotions. Stress, liaison and elision are not explicitly dealt with.

```
L'ARTICULATION DES VOYELLES NASALES

1 Opposition voyelle / voyelle nasale.              2 Opposition entre les voyelles nasales.

Écoutez et répétez ces couples de mots.            Écoutez et retrouvez le sens de ces groupes de
Retrouvez les sons sur le tableau.                 mots.
Écrivez ces mots. Mettez un article quand il       Écrivez-les et notez les voyelles que vous
s'agit d'un nom.                                    entendez.

Exemple : [ p ɛ ] / [ p ɛ̃ ] → la paix / le pain.   Exemple : du bon pain de campagne.
                                                             [ɔ̃] [ɛ̃]    [ɑ̃]
    Position avant    ———➤    arrière
    [ ɛ ] - [ ɛ̃ ]      [ œ ] - [ œ̃ ]   [ ɔ ] - [ ɔ̃ ]
                     [ ɑ ] - [ ɑ̃ ]
```

Extract 4.12 *Panorama 2*, p. 19

```
CONSTRUCTION ET INTONATION              1 Posez la question avec « est-ce que (qui) ».
DE L'INTERROGATION
                                        • Elle chante.
Avec chacune des phrases suivantes, utilisez les    → Qui est-ce qui chante ? Etc.
6 mots interrogatifs de la liste pour poser des     → ...........,....
questions.                              • Il a fait quelque chose de grave.
Écoutez la cassette. Vérifiez la correction de vos
questions et répétez.                   2 Posez la question avec l'inversion du
                                        pronom.
                                        • Il travaille.
  qui - avec qui - que / qu' - pourquoi -    → Qui travaille ?
            où - quand                       → Que fait-il ?
                                             → ...........
                                        • Elle a dansé.
                                             → ...........
```

Extract 4.13 *Panorama 2*, p. 27

4.3.3 French publishers: intermediate to advanced levels

Le Nouvel Espaces 3, in common with many of the advanced courses produced by
British publishers in the late 1980s and 1990s, has no material or activities devoted to
systematic work on pronunciation. As with the British produced materials, we can
only guess that this is because the authors feel that the learners for whom the course is
intended will already have an acceptable standard of pronunciation and improvement
will come through extensive practise rather than explicit work on phonology.

Le français en gros plans adopts a rather different approach. Although the course units do not refer to pronunciation as such, the introduction includes a four page explanation of ways in which the listening activities in the course can be used to improve learners' pronunciation. Stress, rhythm, intonation, liaison, elision and individual sounds are all covered. The explanations given are very brief and assume that learners are familiar with the principles of French phonology in general, which is perhaps quite reasonable at this level of course. However, the explanations are followed by suggested exercise types which are aimed at increasing the learner's awareness of how these principles are applied in practice and bringing the learner's own oral production closer to that of the native speakers featured on the accompanying audio- and video-cassettes.

---

2. Repérer les accents et allongements syllabiques

En théorie, en français, l'accent est peu marqué et fixe : le plus souvent il y a allongement de la dernière syllabe du groupe de mots qui correspond à une unité de sens, ou de la dernière syllabe d'un mot prononcé isolément. Par exemple, C. Fabreguette (Unité 4) dit : *L'endroit où nous sommes est un dispositif euh assez sophistiqué de visioconférence et avec ce système euh nous allons très prochainement euh avoir des échanges avec des universités américaines euh avec qui nous avons par ailleurs des accords de coopération.*

Mais l'accent peut aussi porter sur la première syllabe des mots que l'on souhaite mettre en relief. Il s'agit alors d'un accent d'insistance (v. par exemple Odette qui dit, au début de l'Unité 1, *j'ai une nature assez curieuse*).

L'accentuation de la première syllabe est un phénomène de plus en plus répandu. On remarque en effet actuellement le développement de l'accentuation sur la première syllabe sans que cela soit dû à un accent d'insistance. Ceci est particulièrement vrai à la radio et à la télévision. Les intervenants essaient ainsi de rendre leur discours plus vivant ou convaincant en accentuant le début des mots et ce phénomène a tendance à se répandre dans la population en général. Il se remarque tout particulièrement chez Olivier-René Veillon, dans l'Unité 10 :

Donc, la pluralité des langues doit être un atout dans la conception, dans la production des œuvres qui sont diffusées sur Arte, doit être vécue comme un élément enrichissant de l'offre de programmes d'Arte.

On trouve en fait beaucoup de variations selon les locuteurs, et chez un même locuteur.

Exercices possibles

a) Repérer chez différents locuteurs les allongements syllabiques, les syllabes prononcées un peu plus fort que les autres et les accents sur les premières syllabes.

b) Comparer et imiter des locuteurs différents, par exemple Josette Rey-Debove et Alain Duval dans l'Unité 2.

Extract 4.14 *Le français en gros plans*, p. 14

4.4 Other materials

Finally there are two courses which do not fit neatly into the categories used above. *Café Crème* is jointly published by a French and English publishing house. The student's course book has the appearance of a *Français Langue Etrangère* text, in that it is entirely in French and does not give the overt impression of being aimed at learners of any particular first-language background. The study guide which accompanies the course, however, is partly in English and relates the main text to the linguistic and cultural assumptions of (British) anglophone learners.

Each unit has a section on pronunciation, covering all of the main features of French phonology. Unlike any of the other materials reviewed, *Café Crème* gives equal prominence to suprasegmental features alongside individual phonemes. Indeed, the first four units deal only with stress, rhythm and intonation and the examination and practice of individual sounds is not introduced until unit 5.

This means that suprasegmental features receive a fairly full treatment, corresponding to the importance ascribed to these areas by applied linguists such as Brown (1995) and Ross (1992).

Observez et répétez

▶ **Les rythmes** 🔲

● **Écoutez et répétez.**

– Vous êtes… ?

– Thierry ! Je m'appelle Thierry, Thierry Mistral !

– Je suis étudiant, étudiant en histoire.

L'accent tonique se met

– à la fin d'un mot : Thierry !

– ou d'un groupe de mots : Thierry Mistral !

L'accent tonique se déplace :

– Je suis étudiant.

– Je suis étudiant en histoire.

▶ **Les mélodies** 🔲

● **Écoutez et répétez.**

– Vous vous appelez comment ?
Mot interrogatif à la fin : la voix monte.

– Qu'est-ce que vous faites dans la vie ?
Mot interrogatif au début : la voix descend.

– Vous êtes français ?
La réponse est oui ou non : la voix monte.

● **À deux, posez des questions et répondez.**

1. Vous vous appelez comment ?
2. Vous êtes français(e)…?
3. Qu'est-ce que vous faites dans la vie ?
4. Vous habitez où ?
5. Vous habitez toujours… ?

Extract 4.15 *Café Crème*, p. 25

▶ Les sons [i] [y] [u] ▮▮▮

④ Écoutez et classez les aliments.

	[i]	[y]	[u]
sucre		sucre	
riz			
confiture			
jus de fruits			
poulet			
moule			
yaourt			
cassoulet			
citron			

⑤ Jouez.

A dit : « Je vais au supermarché et je prends du sucre. »
B répète et complète : « Je vais au supermarché et je prends du sucre et du riz. »
C répète et complète : « Je vais au supermarché et je prends du sucre, du riz et de la confiture. »

Continuez...

▶ Les mélodies ▮▮▮

⑥ Écoutez les appréciations et trouvez l'intrus.

1. Mm ! le gâteau, il est délicieux !
2. Les frites ? Je n'aime pas les frites froides !
3. Mm ! votre cassoulet, il est... génial !
4. Le rôti de veau ? Mm ! formidable !

Vous déjeunez chez Martine. Appréciez les plats.

Extract 4.16 *Café Crème*, p. 55

Plaisir des sons is a course dealing only with pronunciation and has activities appropriate to learners at a variety of levels. Whilst the book and cassettes concentrate mainly on individual phonemes, there is also a running theme of the use of intonation to express intentions and emotions. Stress and rhythm, on the other hand, receive no explicit treatment. *Plaisir des sons* suggests many potential problem areas for learners from a wide range of first-language backgrounds.

PORTRAIT

[e]
- aigu
- tendu
- non labial

[ə]
- grave
- tension moyenne
- labial

[ɛ]
- aigu
- relâché
- non labial
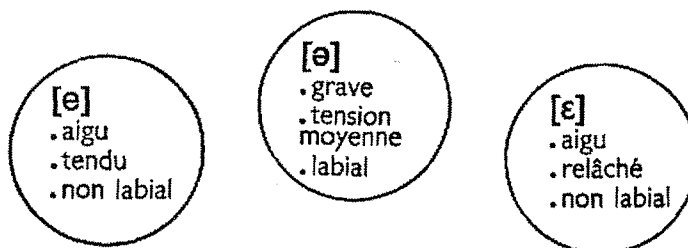
DIAGNOSTIC

Le [ə] n'existe pas dans certaines langues :

▷ Les élèves assimilent le [ə] à [e̞] * (ex : les hispanophones, les italophones, etc.). Il faut alors faire acquérir le phénomène de la labialité.

▷ Les élèves assimilent le [ə] à [ɔ] (ex : les arabophones). Il faut alors travailler *l'acuité.* Cette confusion sera traitée plus en détail dans la leçon suivante.

Avec les élèves qui ne marquent pas suffisamment la distinction entre [e] et [ɛ] en syllabe accentuable, on travaillera l'opposition tendu/relâché.

Par ailleurs, les anglophones ont tendance à diphtonguer le [e] et le [ɛ]. Pour éviter le relâchement en fin d'émission, on veillera à faire produire ces 2 sons de manière brève et tendue.

Les élèves prononcent [i] au lieu de [ə] ou de [e] (ex : les arabophones). Dans le premier cas, il faut faire acquérir la labialité, dans le second, il faut faire diminuer la tension.

*[e̞] représente une réalisation moyenne entre la voyelle fermée et la voyelle ouverte.

Extract 4.17 *Plaisir des sons*, p. 26

---

2. Entendez-vous le son [ə] ou le son [e] dans les mots suivants :

	[ə]	[e]
dessus	X	
reviens	X	
des		X
repas	X	
départ		X
reprends	X	
leçon	X	
déçu		X

Extract 4.18 *Plaisir des sons*, p. 27

65

4 «Il n'y a qu'à demander!»

[ə] [ø]
[œ]
[ɛ]

Écoutez : Je vous remplace ce soir ?
Répondez : Oui, vous pourriez encore me remplacer ?

Je vous rends ce service ?	Oui, vous pourriez encore me rendre ce service ?
Je vous poste ça ?	Oui, vous pourriez encore me poster ça ?
Je vous débarrasse de ça ?	Oui, vous pourriez encore me débarrasser de ça ?
Je vous renseigne ?	Oui, vous pourriez encore me renseigner ?
Je vous rembourse ?	Oui, vous pourriez encore me rembourser ?
Je vous répare ça ?	Oui, vous pourriez encore me réparer ça ?

Extract 4.19 *Plaisir des sons*, p. 32

4.5 Conclusions

The course materials surveyed approach the teaching and learning of phonology from a wide range of perspectives. Insofar as any general conclusions can be drawn, it appears to be the case that the courses produced by British publishers approach the teaching of French phonology from the standpoint of certain assumptions about the features which are likely to pose problems for anglophone learners. Whether this is based on a contrastive analysis or practical classroom experience it is impossible to say.

The British produced materials, with notable exceptions, such as *The French Experience*, are dominated by their consideration of individual sounds, whereas, whilst the courses emanating from French publishers also give prominence to individual phonemes, they do tend to offer a more comprehensive approach in respect of suprasegmental features

The full range of materials available *does* provide opportunities for teaching all of the features of French phonology should teachers decide to do so, although this could not be achieved by any of the courses taken individually. Lack of awareness of the available materials and/or lack of time for preparing supplementary activities would pose a real practical problem for any teacher trying to devise a comprehensive pronunciation syllabus.

Finally, it is interesting to note that a number of the advanced courses, both British and French (e.g., *Décollage* and *Le Nouvel Espaces 3*), have no explicit pronunciation work at all. The assumption seems to be that this is unnecessary at this level, although my own experience is that this is far from being the case. Any teacher using these courses would certainly have to devote a large amount of time to devising a full phonological learning programme for his/her classes in the absence of such materials or activities in the coursebooks.

Chapter Five
Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will look at the methodology used to conduct the present research. The need to relate the choice of methodology to the nature of the research questions will be discussed and the type of research will be defined. The data collection techniques and instruments will be described along with their piloting and use. The methods of data analysis will be explained. Finally, I will evaluate each of the foregoing choices and their practical use.

5.2 What are the questions?

In order to choose a suitable methodology to underpin the selection and use of the research instruments, it is necessary to revisit the questions we are asking, as the nature of the questions asked effectively determines the methods required to seek answers.

The present research is based on six central question themes.

1. Which aspects of French phonology do teachers perceive as major causes of unintelligibility and/or difficulty for their learners?

2. Which aspects of French phonology do learners perceive as major causes of unintelligibility and/or difficulty?

3. Which aspects of French phonology are consciously taught? How are they taught?

4. Which aspects of French phonology are consciously learned? How are they learned?

5. Do existing teaching/learning materials address perceived areas of phonological unintelligibility and/or difficulty? What are their priorities?

6.   Does an analysis of learner pronunciation confirm the perceptions of difficulty/unintelligibility held by teachers and learners and/or the priorities of teaching/learning materials?

The study of teaching/learning materials can be conducted by an examination of published texts and therefore presents very little by way of methodological difficulty. To attempt to answer questions one to four, however, it is necessary to first obtain information, as these are areas in which existing information is very scarce and often anecdotal. Question six, on the other hand, requires the establishment of procedures for the collection and analysis of data which will be methodologically valid and reliable.

5.3 What type of research is this?

Before considering the choice of data collection instruments and methods of data analysis, it is necessary to take a further step back and consider the theoretical paradigms underpinning the research project as a whole and the specific questions asked. The nature of the questions asked implies a particular type of research which, in turn, will influence the choice of methods, techniques and instruments for data collection and analysis.

In short, the aim is to establish a unity between the fundamental nature of the research, the specific questions asked and the methods and techniques chosen to try to answer the questions.

To start at the beginning, the present project is a *research* project following the definition offered by Nunan (1992:3) in that it "is a systematic process of inquiry consisting of three elements...: (1) a question, problem or hypothesis, (2) data, (3) analysis and interpretation of data."

Seliger and Shohamy (1989: chapter six) propose three fundamental types of research: qualitative, descriptive and experimental. Qualitative research considers naturally occurring phenomena, descriptive research investigates elicited data but does not

attempt to test preconceived hypotheses in a "scientific" way, experimental research involves the testing of hypotheses by the control and manipulation of phenomena.

Seliger and Shohamy recognise that what is involved is a cline (with qualitative and experimental research at each end) rather than three distinct compartments. Neither does it follow that any one paradigm is "better" than another. Some questions, particularly those seeking to establish causal relationships between controllable variables are likely to be best investigated using an experimental research design and statistical analysis of data obtained. Research questions in areas where control of variables is inherently limited but where sufficient data may not occur naturally may be best suited to a descriptive design. If the central theme of the research is to investigate behaviour in unique, naturally occurring contexts, then a qualitative research design will be most appropriate.

This research project can best be described as "descriptive". On the one hand, a wholly qualitative study is excluded, as it is questionable whether adequate data from such a broad area as "French phonology" could be obtained in wholly naturalistic contexts. Moreover, the collection of such a vast and amorphous body of data and the procedures required to analyse it would be highly impractical. On the other hand, the impossibility of controlling variables or establishing causality makes an experimental design impossible. It should also be noted that the perceptions and opinions of teachers and learners are not directly observable or measurable phenomena and cannot therefore be the subject of experimental research. At the same time, perceptions and opinions must be elicited and their study is not, therefore, possible within a wholly qualitative framework.

Continuing with Seliger and Shohamys' typology, the research is *synthetic* in the sense that it looks at relationships between parts of the research field (i.e. learners, teachers, materials) rather than *analytic* in the sense of focussing on one constituent part of the field (e.g. problems faced by anglophone learners in articulating French nasal vowels).

Furthermore, the research is *heuristic* rather than *deductive*. It is data-driven, does not start with a preconceived hypothesis and seeks to produce descriptions rather than

theories. I would add the qualifier that, at an epistemological level, it is questionable whether any research can take place in the complete absence of preconceptions. Even if there is no stated preconceived hypotheses, the researcher has, at the very least, implicit preconceptions about the status of existing knowledge built into his/her conceptual framework. For example, the researcher who sets out to record "all significant data" in a given context has a view, based on existing knowledge and theories, on what constitutes "significance" in the observed phenomena. Once again it is a matter of a tendencies, rather than sealed boxes, with the objectives of this research situated in a broadly heuristic paradigm.

The research combines applied and practical perspectives. An attempt will be made to describe learner and teacher perceptions, opinions and behaviours combined with an orientation towards changing and improving existing practices. What is involved is not *Action Research* in the narrowest sense of an investigation aimed at improving practice through reflective understanding. This cannot be the case given that data collection takes place using specially designed instruments rather than reflection being based on naturalistic practice. However, features of the action research approach are present in that a major objective of the research is the clarification of existing practice with a view to its improvement. In short, an element of naturalism in the data collection setting is sacrificed in order to gain an element of control over the nature of the data to be collected for analysis.

In summary, the research project framework has a hybrid nature, combining elements from different approaches. This need not be a problem as long as it is recognised for what it is. A clear understanding of the relationship of the research framework to the questions being asked, along with a clear conception of the suitability of different methods and techniques as means to achieving different types of goal, is more important than slavish adherence to a single paradigm as defined in typologies which, by their nature, require simplification of complex realities. I will return to this point in my discussion of the methods and techniques of data analysis used in this project.

5.4 Data Collection: introduction

The central aim of the research project is to study the acquisition of French phonology by adult anglophone learners in order to discover whether there is a convergence or

divergence between learner and teacher perceptions of areas of difficulty and/or unintelligibility, teaching and learning materials and problem areas highlighted in an analysis of actual learner speech. On the one hand, teaching and learning materials can be examined directly. The other aspects, however, are not directly accessible and therefore require some kind of elicitation if meaningful data is to be obtained for analysis.

In designing elicitation instruments to obtain this data, I have been very conscious of the potential dangers outlined by Nunan (1992: 138-9):

> Research...based on elicitation techniques differs from naturalistic observation...most particularly in that the researcher determines in advance what is to be investigated. Researchers need to be aware of two possible threats to the validity of such investigations. The first is that by determining in advance what is going to be considered relevant, other potentially important phenomena might be overlooked. The other danger...is the extent to which the results obtained are an artefact of the elicitation devices employed.

In order to try to match the data collection techniques used to the types of data required and to try to mitigate the dangers outlined by Nunan above, I have consciously chosen to use a number of different types of data collection instruments.

In summary, these comprise questionnaires and interviews to obtain data on teacher and learner perceptions and learner language elicitation devices to obtain samples of learner speech. The data collection begins with a separate (but related) questionnaire to teachers and learners in order to obtain a reasonably large sample of descriptive information. A smaller number of teachers and learners are then interviewed in order to obtain more in-depth explanatory data in an attempt to open out the questions. Finally, samples of learner speech are elicited from a small number of learners in order to provide data of actual learner language which can be compared to the information on teacher and learner perceptions obtained by the questionnaires and interviews.

The choice of two different elicitation instruments to obtain data on a single topic (i.e. teacher and learner perceptions) is quite deliberate. This has been done in order to try

to gain the benefits of each method whilst providing a counterbalance to the potential dangers of each technique.

The questionnaire has been selected as an information gathering instrument for three main reasons. First, it enables information to be collected from a comparatively large number of people. Secondly, it provides the security of anonymity for respondents. This has some importance in that the respondents are drawn from my own colleagues and students. Thirdly, with a set of standardised, semi-closed questions, analysis of responses can be comparatively straightforward.

At the same time, the questionnaires have a number of limitations. First, in the absence of an interviewer it may be difficult to know exactly what meaning respondents ascribe to their answers. This may lead to the data obtained being purely descriptive and lacking in any explanatory value. Secondly, if the data consists of ticks in boxes or very brief written comments, the information obtained may be superficial. Thirdly, it may be impossible to know whether respondents have understood the questions in the sense in which they are intended. Even with carefully prepared questions, explanatory glosses and piloting of the questionnaires there may still be some lingering doubt in this area.

In order to try to mitigate some of these problems, semi-structured interviews are used in conjunction with the questionnaires. The lack of anonymity and the possibility of the interviewer influencing the interviewee are potential problems with an interview strategy for data collection, but at the same time, used alongside a questionnaire, interviews may be able to obtain more explanatory information than a standardised questionnaire can provide. At the same time, the greater complexity of interview responses whilst providing possibly richer data may present problems at the level of analysis.

Major discrepancies between the data collected using the two techniques could be a sign that one or the other instrument is flawed or even that neither technique is suitable for the purpose for which it has been selected. Nevertheless, it seems to me that in the context of this particular research the use of two instruments is both

principled and practical and represents the best choice and combination of available techniques.

Finally, the choice of a technique for collecting samples of learners' speech needs to be addressed. Spontaneous speech collected in naturalistic settings might appear to be the best choice, representing as it does second language use in an authentic context, with the focus on meaning rather than form. However, this option has been rejected for three main reasons. First, the "not enough data" argument. There is no reason to believe that a wholly naturalistic sample of learner speech would provide data across the full phonological range of French including segmental and suprasegmental features. Secondly, there is a "too much data" argument. If learner language is sampled in a naturalistic way, with no researcher control over what each learner says, then the ensuing quantity and variety of data is likely to be too extensive and diverse to allow analysis to take place. Thirdly, there is a "muddying the waters" argument. If learner language is sampled naturalistically, it may be very difficult to know if breakdowns in intelligibility result from phonological causes or are in fact the result of problems with other language systems (i.e. lexis or syntax). Once again, Nunan's caveat about the danger of the elicitation instrument influencing the nature of the data collected must be kept in mind in the design of the instrument itself (Nunan 1991:139).

Having introduced the chosen data collection techniques in a general way, I will discuss the questionnaires, interviews and learner speech collection instruments separately and in more detail in the following sections.

5.5 Data collection instruments: design and piloting
5.5.1 The Questionnaires - design

The questionnaires and associated materials used in the research are all included in this chapter (with the exception of the third learner speech elicitation instrument, which is reproduced in chapter seven). The overall approach to design and use of the teacher and learner questionnaires was based on Nunan (1996: chapter 7) who proposes a five stage approach to questionnaire based research, namely "construct – pilot – administer – collate responses – interpret responses". The wording of the

questions was influenced by Converse and Presser (1986) whose work identifies the effects of question design on questionnaire based research.

First of all, a questionnaire, as a self-report instrument, is based on three principal assumptions:

The respondent can understand the questions

The respondent possesses the information to answer the questions

The respondent is willing to answer the questions honestly

The first assumption is often problematic in questionnaire design and use. Sheatsley (1983: 200 quoted in Converse and Presser, 1986: 10) observes

> because questionnaires are usually written by educated persons who have a special interest in and understanding of the topic of their inquiry…it is common for questionnaires to be overwritten, overcomplicated and too demanding of the respondent…

A balance has to be struck between the content of the questions, which must be capable of eliciting the type of information sought, and their format, which must be understandable to the respondents. With this in mind, a covering gloss was included with the questionnaire to clarify any "technical" terms used in the questionnaire. The letters sent to teachers and learners were identical in all respects except for the opening ("Dear Colleague" in one case, "Dear French learner" in the other).

> Bill Alder
> c/o Adult and Community Education
> HCAT

Dear Colleague,

As part of my research I am investigating the teaching and learning of French pronunciation by learners whose first language is English. I would be very grateful if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire. which will provide me with much relevant information.

Do not worry about "technical" language: if you wish to give an example or explanation, please do so in your own words. The "linguistic" terms in the questionnaire should be understood as follows:

Individual sounds: e.g. consonants, such as /p/ in *peur*
vowels, such as /i / in *ville*
nasal vowels, such as /ɛ̃/ in *main*
semi-vowels, such as /w/ in *trois*

Stressed syllables within words: e.g. *telephone* (English); *téléphone* (French)

Liaison: when a normally silent sound is pronounced, e.g. *les enfants*

Elision: when a normally pronounced sound is silent, e.g. *patisserie* said as *pa ti sri*

Stressed syllables within phrases: the rhythm of continuous speech, e.g. *Mister Jones isn't in today*, or *Monsieur Dupont n'est pas là aujourd'hui*

Intonation: the rise and fall in the pitch of the voice, e.g. *Have you seen him?* (voice falls on "him"), or *Tu l'as vu?* (voice rises on "vu")

The survey is anonymous and the information it contains will only be used for academic research. The questionnaire can be returned to me using the envelope provided. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Best wishes

[signature]

Bill Alder

Sample 5.1 Letter to teachers.

With regard to the second assumption, given that the questions concerned perceptions and opinions rather than factual knowledge, it seems reasonable to assume that the respondents possessed the necessary information to answer. If they held no opinions it

was possible to simply not answer a given question. A separate "no opinion" box was not offered, as I felt that this was likely to discourage reflection by respondents.

As for the third assumption, the anonymity of the questionnaire was intended to encourage honesty in self-reporting. Thornton (1996: 71) points out that even with anonymous questionnaires "students may respond with socially desirable answers which they feel will show them in a good light with the teacher". However, given that the respondents were drawn from adult learners and language teachers, who might be considered less likely to be influenced by a desire to "please the teacher" than the adolescent respondents surveyed by Thornton, and given the "socially neutral" content of the questions, this "halo effect" seemed unlikely to have a very significant effect on responses.

Return of the questionnaires was by post in a pre-paid envelope. Although this may have led to a slightly lower response rate than if the questionnaires had been collected in person, postal return further guaranteed the respondents' anonymity and was therefore likely to encourage honest self-reporting.

As with any postal questionnaire, in the absence of an interviewer to explain questions or interpret responses, there may be ambiguity in the expression of responses. In my opinion, this was a price worth paying if a reasonably broad cross-section of learners was to be questioned.

The questionnaires to teachers and learners were identical in content. This was necessary if responses were to be comparable, such a comparison being an integral part of the project. The only difference was in the wording of the rubric ("cause you difficulties" for learners, "cause your learners difficulties" for teachers) and in the wording of the "any other comments" section.

Six features of French phonology were identified – individual sounds, stressed syllables within words, liaison, elision, stressed syllables within phrases and intonation – each of which were explained in the accompanying gloss. In selecting and describing these categories I was mindful of Nunan's caveat (1992: 139) that "by determining in advance what is going to be considered relevant, other potentially important phenomena might be overlooked."

In particular, I was concerned by one feature which was included in the list and another which was omitted. The inclusion which concerned me was "stressed syllables within words". Although this is a typical feature of English phonology, French stress patterns are primarily determined by rhythm groups rather than individual words having "fixed" stressed and unstressed syllables (see page 23 above).

Nevertheless, after considerable reflection, I decided to leave this category in the questionnaire, as it gives teachers and learner an opportunity to comment on an area of potential difficulty and/or unintelligibility caused by language transfer from the learners' first language phonological system to the sound system of the language being learned.

The category omitted from the questionnaire which gave cause for concern was "open versus closed syllabification". Given the importance of open syllabification as a characteristic of French phonology and given the contrast between typical French and English syllabification patterns (see page 16 above), it might seem that open syllabification should appear as a feature for questionnaire respondents to comment on. That it does not appear is largely due to practical considerations. Syllabification patterns require fairly complex description and analysis and can often only be explained by means of phonemic transcription. Such a level of description and analysis would almost certainly be beyond the capacity of most (if not all) respondents. Therefore, I concluded that the inclusion of open syllabification in the questionnaire would serve no useful purpose and would probably cause confusion for respondents, which, in turn, might spill over to the other areas in which responses were required.

The phonological categories in the questionnaires were presented generally (for example, "intonation", rather than "intonation in imperative phrases", "intonation in questions where affirmative word order is maintained", etc.). This was in order to keep the questionnaire to manageable length for the respondents, avoid the introduction of more meta-linguistic terminology and to keep the data within analysable proportions. However, respondents were encouraged to make comments

and give examples, thereby allowing for specific areas within the general categories to be highlighted.

In responding to the questionnaire both teachers and learners were required to ascribe a degree of difficulty to each of the phonological areas, ranging from "very serious" through "serious" and "slight" to "no difficulty". A four point response scale was chosen following advice that if an uneven number of possible responses is offered then respondents have a psychological tendency to chose the "middle" option, which may distort the data obtained. The response categories are obviously subjective and there is no way of being sure that different respondents will interpret them in the same way. However, this is not necessarily a problem. Given that the questionnaire is in fact about teacher and learner *perceptions* and *opinions*, this element of subjectivity is not only inevitable but may even be seen as desirable. What the questionnaires lose in *reliability*, through an apparent imprecision in the categorisation of responses, they gain in *validity* as a measure of that which they are intended to measure, that is to say teachers' and learners' *feelings* about the subject.

5.5.2 The questionnaires – piloting

Following their initial design, the teacher and learner questionnaires were piloted. For the teacher questionnaire a pilot sample of four teachers of French to adults (two French native-speakers and two non-native-speakers) was used. The terminology of the questionnaire and gloss did not appear to be a problem: responses and comments were all against the appropriate rubrics. All respondents added comments in addition to ticking a column for each question. However, it became apparent that it would be helpful if the final version included an "any other comments" section, as one of the respondents gave me verbal feedback on the questions which she said she had been unable to include with her written response as she was unsure which rubric to place it against.

The learner questionnaire was piloted with ten learners drawn from my own classes. Once again, the wording of the questions did not seem to be a problem, as responses and comments were all against the correct rubrics. Of the ten respondents six gave examples and/or comments. This augured well for the final version as it added more descriptive information than could be conveyed by ticks in columns. As with the

teacher questionnaire pilot, one respondent gave verbal feedback indicating that she would have liked to add further comments but was not sure where to put them. This confirmed the impression that the final version of the questionnaire would benefit from an "any other comments" section.

Further discussion with the pilot respondents led to the conclusion that, apart from the change noted above, no major adjustments were required and the questionnaires were fit instruments for the purpose for which they had been conceived. The final version of the questionnaire follows.

Please indicate which of the following features of French pronunciation cause difficulties for your learners by placing a tick in the appropriate column. In some cases you may wish to tick more than one column. If so, please explain your decision.

	1 Very serious difficulties	2 Serious difficulties	3 Slight difficulties	4 No difficulties
Individual sounds				

Please give examples

Stressed syllables within words

Please give examples

Liaison

Please give examples

Elision

Please give examples

Stressed syllables within phrases

Please give examples

Intonation

Please give examples

If you would like to make any more comments about your experiences teaching French pronunciation to adult English speaking learners, please continue over the page.

Sample 5.2 Teachers questionnaire.

5.6.1 The interview format – design

As explained on page 73 above, the purpose of the teacher and learner interviews is to add data which is potentially richer in its explanatory value than that which can be obtained by the questionnaires alone. Whereas the questionnaires offer a broad brush treatment of the questions, the interviews attempt to provide both more detailed responses, reasons behind responses and an opportunity for interviewees to branch off into questions concerning the topic which may not be directly addressed by the questionnaires. The interview guidelines themselves appear below. In the following paragraphs I will present an explanation of the chosen format and the specific questions asked.

As with the questionnaires, the staging of the interviewing is based on Nunan (1992: chapter 7), that is: "translate research objectives into interview questions/schedules – pilot – select subjects – conduct interviews – collate data – analyse data." The interviews can be described as "semi-structured" in that, whilst pre-prepared questions are used, the questions are mainly open, the interviewees have freedom to answer in whatever way they choose and an "any other comments" question is included. The interviewees received copies of the guidelines before the interview in order to give them an idea of what was likely to be discussed and an opportunity to reflect on their views. Interviewees were also informed in advance that the interviews were to be audio-recorded for later analysis.

Whilst interviewing has the benefit that the interviewer can clarify both questions and answers, there is also the danger that he/she will "lead" the interviewee. Moreover, given the personal contact inherent in the interview technique, there is perhaps a greater danger of the "halo effect" (described in the discussion of questionnaire design) coming into play. Consequently, it is not only important that the interview questions do not influence the possible answers, but also that the conduct of the interview itself does not produce data which is a product of the interview situation rather than the views of the interviewee.

The interview schedules for both teachers and learners are divided into nine phases. The set questions are different for teachers and learners but each phase deals with the same theme. The aim of this "same themes/different questions" approach is to elicit

parallel data from each side of the teaching/learning equation. The interviewees have a common starting point but are able to expand their responses in the context of their specific situations and roles in the teaching/learning scenario.

The rationale for each phase of the interviewing schedule is as follows.

Phase one is the warm-up which seeks to put the interviewee at ease and ensure clarity in the interview concerning terminology and issues.

Phase two contextualises the interviewee's teaching/learning situation.

Phase three contextualises the interviewee's responses within his/her overall opinion of what constitutes successful pronunciation learning and to what extent this has been achieved in his/her specific context.

Phases four and five allow for expansion of information given in the questionnaire. In addition to allowing for more descriptive comments, a "why?" question attempts to elicit explanatory data. Furthermore, these two phases of the schedule allow interviewees to distinguish between perceived difficulty of acquisition of phonological features and the contribution of mispronunciation of particular features to unintelligibility. This may help us to clarify whether those features of L2 phonology which are considered particularly difficult to acquire are necessarily the same as those which cause oral communication to break down.

Phase six attempts to establish whether there is a convergence between the opinions expressed in phases four and five and the pronunciation teaching and learning that actually takes place in the classroom. Of course, due to the self-reporting status of the interview format, it is impossible to be certain whether the interviewees' comments reflect fully and accurately what really does take place in the classroom. Nevertheless, the questions may possibly reveal interesting insights into whether teachers and learners have the same perception of what is happening in the classroom. The final question in this phase of the learners' schedule is an attempt to discover whether teachers and learners ascribe an equal importance to pronunciation teaching following Harlow and Mayskens' (1994) investigation which reported that, out of fourteen

linguistic priorities, learners of French and Spanish surveyed ranked pronunciation fifth whilst teachers put it in tenth place.

Phase seven establishes a link to the section of the research project dealing with published materials for teaching and learning French phonology and provides data on whether teachers and learners believe that the priorities of course materials correspond to their own.

Phase eight is the "any other comments" section. This gives the interviewees an opportunity to expand on what has already been discussed and/or to introduce concerns and perspectives not included in the interviewing schedule.

Phase nine is the warm-down and conclusion to the interview.

Guidelines for teacher interview

1. Introduce interviewee and run through relevant terminology for describing pronunciation.
2. Please describe your current learners.
3. How intelligible do you think your learners' pronunciation is in general?
4. Which features of French phonology do your learners find most difficult? Can you give examples? Why do you think these features are particularly difficult?
5. Which features of your learners' pronunciation do you think are most responsible for losses of intelligibility? Why do you think this is? Can you give examples?
6. What aspects of French phonology have you taught in the last twelve months? Can you give some examples of how you taught them? Were the items taught as part of your scheme of work or in response to perceived learner difficulties?
7. Have you used published course materials as part of your pronunciation teaching? Can you give examples? How useful do you find published course materials for teaching French pronunciation?
8. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your experience of teaching pronunciation?
9. Thank interviewee and conclude interview.

Guidelines for learner interview

1. Introduce interviewee and run through relevant terminology for describing pronunciation.
2. Please describe your French learning experience.
3. How intelligible do you think your French pronunciation is in general?
4. Which features of French phonology do you find most difficult? Can you give examples? Why do you think these features are particularly difficult?
5. Which features of your pronunciation do you think are most responsible for losses of intelligibility? Why do you think this is? Can you give examples?
6. What aspects of French phonology have you been taught in the last twelve months? Can you give some examples of how they were taught? Do you think that you would have found more pronunciation work helpful?
7. Have you tried to improve your pronunciation through self-study? Have you used published course materials for this? How useful did you find them?
8. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your experience of learning French pronunciation?
9. Thank interviewee and conclude interview.

Sample 5.3 Guidelines for interviews.

5.6.2 The interview format – piloting

The interview schedule described above was piloted with two teachers and two learners drawn from my own students and colleagues. On the whole the format seemed to work well. Analysis of the recordings suggested that any problems with the

schedule as a data collection instrument did not lie in the format itself but in my own interviewing techniques. I resolved to take the following steps in the interviews.

- To avoid "steering" the discussion too much into areas of interest to me rather than areas chosen by the interviewees.

- To try to avoid closed questions. Although answers to open questions are harder to categorise and analyse, they provide potentially richer data.

- To listen more and talk less.

- To aim for shorter, clearer questions when departing from the set questions in the schedule.

5.7.1 The learner speech elicitation instruments – design

Three elicitation instruments were used to stimulate learner speech. This approach replicated Dickerson (1975) whose research instruments for studying interlanguage phonology were threefold, based on word lists, free speech and reading aloud. Although Dickerson's research is quite old, her approach is methodologically sound from the point of view of collecting a balanced range of learner language samples.

In the first instrument, the learners were asked to pronounce one word from thirty seven groups of five words. Each group featured a different French phoneme. The learners chose one word from each group at random, thereby ensuring that the listener did not become familiar with the words being pronounced, which could influence her judgement of the intelligibility of what she heard. The learners were then asked to pronounce one word or phrase from six further groups. These groups exemplified the following features of French phonology:

- French/English cognates and polysyllabic French words to discover if learners' intelligibility was affected by transfer of English word stress patterns to French.

- Short phrases to investigate the use of rhythm group stress.

- Words and phrases requiring liaison.

- Phrases in which elision would normally take place in the pronunciation of French native-speakers

- Structurally and lexically identical phrases in which intonation affects meaning (specifically, affirmation and interrogation).

Please pronounce one word from each of the following groups
dis   lit   ni   riz   vit
du   lu   nu   rue   vu
doux   loup   nous   roue   vous
le   me   se   te   de   les   mes   ses   thé   des
lait   mais   sait   tais   dais
chat   table   pas   espace   bras
bord   corps   mort   sol   port
beurre   cœur   seul   meurt   peur
beau   nôtre   émaux   pauvre   faux
bœuf   neutre   émeut   peu   feu
son   don   mont   marron   longue
sans   dans   ment   marrant   language
saint   pain   main   marin   lin
un   brun   aucun
lui   nuage   tuer   puis   enfuir
Louis   louer   alouette   tatouage   fouet
paille   des yeux   payé   fille   famille
tant   tort   tu   tête   été
dent   dort   du   dette   aider
prune   poire   Pierre   pas   plomb
brune   boire   bière   bas   blond
faim   foie   font   fendre   sportif
vin   voie   vent   vendre   sportive
hausser   race   laisse   ils sont   dessert
oser   rase   lèse   ils ont   desert
chou   manche   chant   hache   marche
joue   mange   gens   âge   marge
quai   carré   oncle   coûter   bac
gai   garer   ongle   goûter   bague
rêve   prie   rond   cours   rare
lève   plie   long   coule   râle
matin   âme   caméra   mont   maison
note   année   nuit   non   nez
ignorer   signe   magnifique   champagne   vigne
parking   shopping   camping
hôtel   heure   huître   habiller   haché

Sample 5.4 First learner speech elicitation instrument part 1.

Please pronounce one word or phrase from each group

Restaurant
Impossible
Téléphone
Electrique
Automobile

Aujourd'hui
Natation
Irlandais
Framboise
Gonfler

Pour l'avenir
Il va maintenant
Elle a raison
Il n'a rien dit
Ils sont déjà partis

Les étudiants
Un enfant
Aux Etats-Unis
Le sud-est
Allez-y!
Un petit enfant

A la semaine prochaine
Tu te lèves tôt
Je vais travailler
Mon petit restaurant
Je vous le passe

Ça fait vingt? Ça fait vingt.
Ça va. Ça va?
Vous êtes allés en France? Vous êtes allés en France.
La plage était sale. La plage était sale?
Tu aimes voyager? Tu aimes voyager.

Sample 5.5 First learner speech elicitation instrument part 2.

The samples of learners' pronunciation were audio-recorded. The listener listened to the recording of each learner, stopping the tape after each word or phrase and writing down what she heard. The listening took place in two sessions on separate days in order to minimise the possible effect of listener fatigue on assessment of intelligibility. Although the learners' speech was decontextualised and lacked the kind of non-verbal support (gesture, etc.) which characterises most authentic oral interaction, this seemed

justified insofar as the purpose of the investigation was to examine the influence of *pronunciation* on intelligibility. Intelligibility would be measured quite simply by whether the listener wrote down the same word/phrase that the learner had spoken.

The second elicitation instrument consisted of two similar but slightly different pictures (see below).
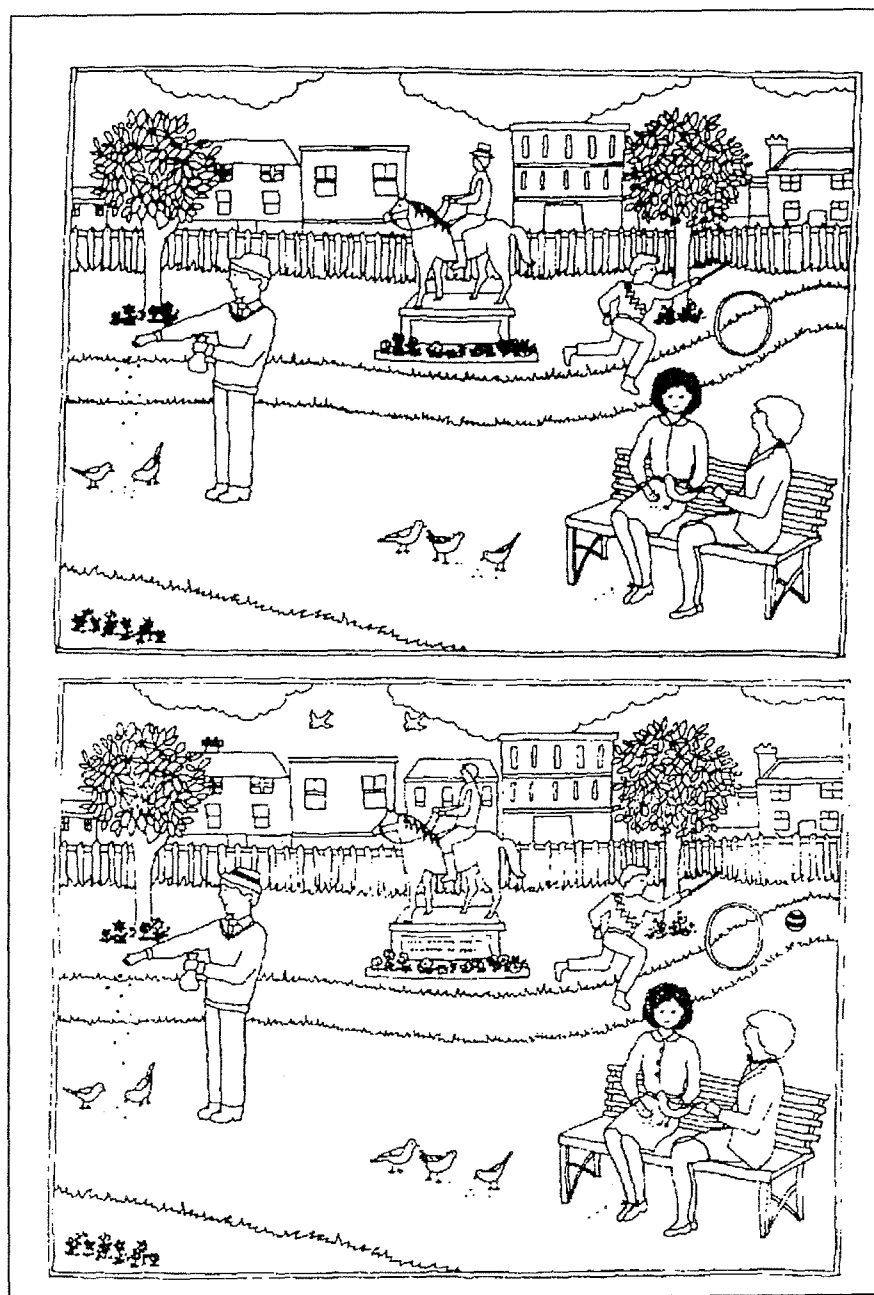
Sample 5.6 Second learner speech elicitation instrument.

The learners were asked to describe one of the pictures in about ten phrases. The learners were told that the listener would have both pictures and would attempt to decide which picture was being described. The learners were given a short preparation time to look up unfamiliar vocabulary required for the description. This was necessary in order to minimise the possibility that unintelligibility might result from non-phonological factors, such as incorrect lexis being used.

The listener listened to the learner's recorded description, stopping the tape after each phrase. She then attempted to recreate what the learner had said, using the pictures as a contextualisation device. Having repeated this procedure for each phrase, the listener then attempted to decide which picture was being described (for example, how many houses are mentioned). The visual context made this activity closer to the conditions of authentic speech situations. At the same time, the requirement for the learners to produce longer utterances allowed for the suprasegmental features of French to play a greater role than in the first activity. Intelligibility would be measured by two outcomes: first, how many phrases was the listener able to reconstitute with the aid of the pictures; secondly, was the listener able to decide correctly which picture was being described.

The third elicitation instrument, which aimed to concentrate on features of connected speech, consisted of sixteen texts chosen from Malécot (1977: 55-66). These texts were based on audio-recordings of "educated" Parisian native French speakers made by Malécot and were chosen for their "caractère phonétique représentatif" (page 55). The aim of this elicitation instrument was to discover whether continuous learner speech exhibited the same characteristics (with regard to areas of intelligibility breakdown) as the articulation of given phonological features in isolation. The learners chose a text without the prior knowledge of the researcher or listener and were audio-recorded reading the text aloud. The texts used are reproduced in chapter seven along with the account of the listener's responses.

The listener and the researcher listened at a later date to the audio-recordings and attempted to reconstruct what the learner was saying, with a second listening to any words or phrases which were incomprehensible. On each occasion when intelligibility broke down the listener and researcher found the relevant text, read the appropriate

section and attempted to ascertain *why* what had been heard differed from the original text.

The decision to use a "read-aloud" text was one of the most difficult in the design of the data collection instruments. In many ways reading aloud is an "unnatural" linguistic activity in that it is rarely encountered in naturalistic language use outside specific situations such as reading stories to children, reading the news on television or giving a prepared speech. In addition to the inauthenticity of a read-aloud text, it could be argued that the presence of a written text, particularly when the language being read (in this case French) has rules concerning the relationship of spelling to sound which are very different from those of the speaker's first language (in this case English), might actually induce pronunciation errors.

Nevertheless, the control offered by the "read-aloud" texts seemed to offer a useful counterbalance to the unpredictability of the responses to the picture stimuli and the limited role of suprasegmentals in the word/phrase lists.

5.7.2 The learner speech elicitation instruments – piloting

The piloting took place with four learners participating, two using the first instrument and two using both the visual stimulus and read-aloud versions of the second instrument.

The phoneme elicitation worked well with the words exemplifying individual phonemes. My only concern was that the target phonemes should perhaps have been presented in all three word positions (that is, initial, medial and terminal). This would allow for judgements to be made on whether certain phonemes presented different degrees of difficulty according to their word position, for example the phoneme /R/ in *rouge* (word-initial), *orange* (word-medial, following a vowel), *gris* (word-medial, following a consonant) and *vert* (word-final). However, after consideration, I decided against making this change on the grounds that the instrument would become too long and place an unnecessary strain on both the learners and the listener.

The items eliciting stress, intonation, liaison, elision and stress within phrases were less convincing in the piloting phase. It is questionable whether these features, which

usually occur in connected speech, can be studied in such a discrete way. However, in the absence of an alternative, I decided to keep this part of the instrument in the belief that the visual stimulus and read aloud texts would also provide evidence in these phonological areas should further data be required.

The piloting of the continuous speech instruments confirmed my feeling that it would be useful to have both a visual stimulus and "read-aloud" activities. The former provided an element of naturalism whilst the latter allowed for greater control and was easier to analyse. At this stage, neither instrument seemed ideal, but taken together they promised to provide data which would serve its intended purpose.

A further outcome of the piloting was confirmation that the recording equipment to be used was adequate to produce material which could be analysed in the knowledge that unintelligibility was the result of linguistic factors rather than the mechanical sound quality.

5.8 Data analysis

The use of three different data collection techniques has strong implications for the analysis of the data obtained. Each of the sets of data is of a distinct type. The questionnaire responses are quantifiable but the respondents' examples and comments require interpretation. The interview transcripts require interpretation and judgements must be made concerning the relevance and significance to the project of what is said. Finally, the recordings of learner speech must be listened to and analysed for the purpose of classification in relation to the rest of the data.

Given the descriptive (that is non-experimental) nature of the research and the type of data obtained, an exclusively quantitative approach to data analysis is excluded. However, as McDonough and McDonough (1997: 94) point out, the type of overall research approach does not preclude the use of some techniques normally associated with other approaches. Counting is just one way of analysing data to see if patterns or tendencies emerge. So, although the data is not analysed statistically, the frequency of occurrence of certain types of behaviour may help to establish (without "proving" in any scientific sense) certain central tendencies which may illuminate, or be illuminated by, non-quantitative data.

The number of data samples for analysis was determined by practical considerations, primarily how much information could realistically be analysed.

The questionnaires and interview recordings and transcripts were to be analysed by myself. The learner speech recordings, on the other hand, were to be listened to by a non-teacher native speaker of French. It is important that the listener was not acquainted with any of the learners and was not a teacher, as either of these two conditions might lead to judgements that do not accurately reflect the intelligibility of the learners' pronunciation to the native-speakers with whom the learners might interact outside a classroom situation. In this way it was possible to meet Kenworthy's condition for assessing intelligibility that "the ideal judges are listeners who have not had an abnormal amount of exposure to non-native speech nor any previous contact with the speakers being assessed" (1987: 20).

Analysis of the questionnaire responses is based on a straightforward collation and quantification of "ticks in columns" and a qualitative analysis of examples given and comments made. The former would give a "big picture" of respondents' perceptions and views, the latter could provide some explanatory detail of the numerical information obtained.

Analysing the interviews is much more a matter of experience, judgement and intuition. Although numerical tendencies may emerge, the focus of analysis is on *what* is said not *how many times*. What we are seeking are possible explanations of the information gained through the questionnaire responses and a deeper and richer insight into the perceptions and opinions of teachers and learners.

For the learner speech, the listener was a non-teacher native speaker of French, as explained above, using a prepared listening schedule. The responses of the listener were then analysed by myself. Whilst this may appear, in some ways, crude as a way of "measuring" pronunciation, it is the most accurate reflection available of the actual criteria against which learner pronunciation is measured outside a classroom or research environment. As Wenk (1986) observes

Though detailed acoustic records of interlanguage phonology are clearly of interest, these may be felt to be less valuable than would indicators of target deviation based on native speaker judgements, since these alone can tell us whether that deviation is sufficiently important to impinge on their conscious perception of that interlanguage.

In addition to studying the listening schedules to find out how often and in which phonological areas intelligibility broke down, I also wished to try to describe the nature of the learners' deviation from the target norms. To do this, the same categories are used as in the questionnaires, that is individual sounds, word stress, group stress, intonation, liaison and elision. Mispronunciations of individual sounds are divided into *sound substitutions*, where a different sound is substituted for the correct phoneme (e.g., *mais* [/mɛ/] is heard instead of *mes* [/me/]); *sound deletions*, where the learner leaves out a sound (e.g., *poids* [/pwa/] is heard instead of *poire* [/pwaR/]); and *sound insertions*, where the learner adds a sound (e.g., *froid* [/fRwa/] is heard instead of *fois* [/fwa/]).

5.9 Anglophone adult learners of French: the national context

The target population of this research is anglophone adult learners of French. "Adult" is intended here to describe learners who are above the age of compulsory education (currently sixteen in Great Britain). For the purpose of the research, learners who are in a learning context composed exclusively of students in the 16-19 age group (e.g. school sixth forms or sixth form colleges) are excluded from the definition as they represent a very narrow cross-section of the adult language learning population.

The research focuses on learners in instructed group settings. Therefore learners engaged exclusively in self-study are excluded, as are learners whose instruction consists entirely of individual tuition.

"Anglophone" is intended to describe learners whose chosen language of communication (i.e. the language in which they feel they can communicate most successfully) is English. Therefore, learners living in Great Britain who may make a majority of their utterances in English, and whose English may be of near native-speaker standard, but for whom English would not be the language of first choice, are

excluded. Where "English-speaking" or "English-speakers" is used in the text it is intended to be synonymous with "anglophone" in the sense described above.

Precise figures do not exist for the number of anglophone adult learners of French in the United Kingdom. However, it seems likely that the largest number of such learners are enrolled on courses organised by the adult or community education departments of further education colleges. Other significant course providers include dedicated adult education colleges (such as the City Lit.), higher education institutions (particularly the Open University), local authorities (through adult education provision), community colleges with community education provision, the Workers' Educational Association, the prison education service, private language schools and business language training organised on an in-company basis.

Typically, such learners study on a part-time basis, often for between one and two and a half hours per week. Some learners are working towards an accredited qualification (either GCSE or GCE Advanced Level or specifically "adult" qualifications, such as those provided by the Open College Network or the Institute of Linguists), others not.

The level of language may vary from complete beginners to near-native- speaker level (for example, the Institute of Linguists Diploma). The size or degree of specialisation of the course provider determines the extent to which progression routes exist within the institution.

Although exact figures do not exist, anecdotal evidence from organisations such as the Centre for Information on Language Teaching (CILT) and course providers themselves suggests that a large majority of teachers within the sector are employed on part-time, temporary contracts. A high proportion of teachers are native-speakers. There appears to be a majority of female teachers within the sector (perhaps because of the conditions of employment). Until the recent establishment of the Further Education National Training Organisation guidelines, there was no formal requirement for teachers within the sector to hold any formal teaching qualification, although many individual establishments required teachers to hold (or be prepared to obtain) an introductory teaching qualification such as the City and Guilds 7307 certificate.

5.10 The Institutional Context

The overwhelming majority of the present research involved learners and teachers from Hastings College of Arts and Technology (HCAT). HCAT is a medium-sized further education college situated on the south-east coast of England, approximately sixty miles from London.

Hastings is a town with a population of about eighty thousand residents. According to the Office for National Statistics, the age structure of the population is broadly in line with national figures. Average household income is below the national and regional average whilst unemployment is higher than the national or regional average. The proportion of the local population of non-white-British ethnic origin is below the national average and in line with figures for the region.

In the academic year 2000-2001 HCAT enrolled 2,725 full-time students and 11,147 part-time students. A majority of the part-time students followed courses organised by the Community Education sector of HCAT. Although there are other organisers of adult education in Hastings (e.g. a Workers Educational Association branch and initiatives by central and local government), HCAT has a virtual monopoly on adult education language provision in the town. HCAT also organises adult education in the nearby small town of Rye (population about 10, 000).

In 2000-2001 HCAT Community Education enrolled 486 adult language learners. Of these 184 studied French on seventeen different courses at five different levels ranging from complete beginners to GCE Advanced level. HCAT employed nine teachers of French. Of these, one was the full-time languages coordinator (myself), the others were all employed on part-time, temporary contracts. More detailed information on the learners and teachers participating in the research project is included later in this chapter.

For the questionnaire survey part of the research, in order to obtain a larger amount of data, participation was also elicited from learners and teachers at other institutions in the region providing adult French courses. Data for the interviews and learner language studies was obtained entirely from HCAT learners and teachers.

5.11 The Participants

5.11.1 The Teachers

All eight part-time French teachers at HCAT participated in both the questionnaire survey and the teacher interviews. Lack of published information makes it impossible to say whether the teachers are a typical cross-section of adult education French teachers as a whole. However, my own personal experience leads me to believe that, in terms of age, gender, experience and mother-tongue background, the group are fairly typical of the population they were chosen to represent.

At the time of the research, the participants were teaching a total of twenty one adult groups, of which thirteen were at a broadly post elementary level (defined here as roughly equivalent to a GCSE pass level or above). Not all of these groups were being taught under the auspices of HCAT Community Education, as a number of teachers were also working for organisations such as the Workers' Educational Association and the Open University or were teaching some small groups on a private basis. All of the teachers were qualified to at least City and Guilds 7307 level.

An overview of the teacher Interview participants follows.

Teacher	Native- or non-Native speaker	Gender	Age group	Experience
A	Native	Female	51-60	11-20 years
B	Native (Belgian)	Female	51-60	21-30 years
C	Native	Male	21-30	1-10 years
D	Non-native	Female	40-50	21-30 years
E	Native	Female	40-50	11-20 years
F	Native	Female	21-30	1-10 years
G	Non-native	Female	40-50	1-10 years
H	Native	Female	40-50	1-10 years

Table 5.1 Teacher interviewees.

The remaining teachers who participated in the questionnaire survey were drawn from the French teaching staff at other adult education institutions in the region. This wider

group included native- and non-native-speaker teachers with a range of ages and experience and from both genders.

5.11.2 The Listener

The "listener" was a locally resident native-speaker of French who was following a teacher-training course at HCAT. As someone who was not yet very familiar with the typical features of anglophone pronunciation of French and who had not met any of the learners, she was considered to be a reasonably accurate representative of native-speakers to whom learners might speak in communicative situations in France or other French-speaking countries.

5.11.3 The Learners

The learners participating in the questionnaire survey were drawn from adult students at HCAT in the post-elementary French classes and from similar groups at other institutions in the region. Post-elementary learners were targeted in order to put a clearer focus on pronunciation, as it was felt that learners at a lower level might not have sufficient experience of learning the language to be able to offer valid or reliable responses. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents by their teachers and were returned directly in a pre-paid envelope.

The learners who participated in the interviews and learner language activities also participated in the questionnaire survey and were drawn from my own GCE A-level classes. These classes were chosen for two reasons. First, as reasonably advanced learners, it was felt that pronunciation focussed activities would be less likely to be influenced by learner deficits in other language systems. Secondly, at a practical level, these were groups to which I had easy access and with whom I already had a good working relationship. Given the amount of time being demanded of participants, these practical factors were highly important.

Two groups, one evening and one morning, were involved. At the start of the year, the morning group had seven members, which dropped to six by the time of the research. The evening group started with thirteen students, which dropped to eleven. Four of the seventeen students who completed the year did not participate in the research. Three of these were learners who did not have English as their first language (and who

therefore did not fit the research profile), the other was always absent from class when the research activities took place.

Whether the participants are typical of adult anglophone learners of French is impossible to know. From my own experience, the two groups were fairly typical in their composition of adult learners at this level (i.e. GCE A-level) who I have taught. No figures exist to profile adult French learners according to their level of study, but anecdotal evidence (such as personal recollection and discussions with colleagues) suggests that at higher levels of language study learners are likely to be older, from a more privileged socio-economic and educational background and more likely to be motivated by factors other than short-term transactional needs than lower level groups. Nevertheless, the variety of ages, backgrounds and reasons for learning in the target group suggests that they represent a reasonable cross-section of the anglophone French learner population as a whole.

Most of the participants had been taught French as adults by more than one teacher and a majority had been taught by more than one of the HCAT teachers participating in the research. Given this, it seemed less likely that either learner responses or language performance would be unduly influenced by the input of any particular teacher.

Due to practical considerations (such as availability), not every learner participated in all of the research activities. There follows an overview of the participants and a list of which learners participated in which aspects of the research.

Learner	Gender	Age group	No. of teachers at HCAT	Other possible influences on participation
A	Female	61-70	3	Partially deaf
B	Male	61-70	3	Husband of 'A'
C	Female	61-70	1	
D	Female	71-80	3	
E	Male	31-40	2	
F	Male	41-50	1	
G	Female	18-20	1	Fluent Italian speaker
H	Male	51-60	3	
I	Female	51-60	3	
J	Male	51-60	2	
K	Female	21-30	1	
L	Male	21-30	1	Recently spent 9 months in France
M	Male	18-21	1	Lived in France for several years as a child

Table 5.2 Learner interviewees.

Learner participation in the different aspects of the research was as follows.

Activity	Learners
Words and short phrases	A, B, C, D, E, F, H, I, J, K
Picture description	A, B, C, D, E, F, H, I, J, K
Read-aloud text	A, B, C, D, F, G, L, M
Interview	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H

Table 5.3 Learner participation in different parts of the research.

5.12 Evaluation of the methodology of the project

Two of the key concepts used in the evaluation of research design and methodology are *validity* and *reliability* (see, for example, Nunan 1992: chapter 1; Seliger and Shohamy 1989: chapter 8). Validity has three main aspects, *construct*, *internal* and *external*. Construct validity concerns whether the study actually investigates what it claims to be investigating. Internal validity assesses whether the findings of the research are actually the result of the research instruments themselves. External validity refers to whether the results of the research are generalisable from the sample studied to the general population of which it is a representative. Reliability has two

main features, *internal* and *external*. Internal reliability refers to the consistency of data collection, analysis and interpretation within the study itself. External reliability concerns the degree to which the study could be repeated to either confirm or repudiate its results.

The questionnaires and interviews have construct validity in that the questions asked represent an accurate operationalisation of the research questions on which the project is based. The learner speech has construct validity in the sense that the learners' utterances which are elicited contain the central features of the French phononlogical system, mispronunciation of which may lead to a breakdown in effective and comfortable communication. It could be proposed that the use of the learner speech elicitation instruments and the use of audio-recording undermines one element of construct validity in that (with a few exceptions, such as telephone speech) in "real world" oral interaction both interlocutors are normally physically present and the communication takes place in "real time". However, given the overwhelming conceptual and practical difficulties in carrying out a naturalistic study of learner speech (outlined above on page 74), this is a small price to pay for the benefits gained from this quasi-experimental technique.

Not the least of these benefits is that the degree of control allowed by the learner speech elicitation collection tool aids the internal validity of the research by establishing a clear link between "treatment" and data. The questionnaires and interviews also score highly on internal validity in that they seek to obtain teacher and learner perceptions and opinions by…asking teachers and learners about their perceptions and opinions.

External validity is more problematic. Complete generalisability of research is only possible where the sample population can be held to be fully typical of the population as a whole. Given that all language learners are human, and therefore uniquely individual, complete external validity would seem to be impossible. Likewise, the comparatively small size of the subject groups might be considered to undermine the external validity of the project.

If the project was seeking to establish "scientific truths", then these objections could fatally compromise the research. However, as I explained in the introduction to this chapter, the nature of the research is descriptive and applied rather than experimental. The context specificity of the data collection is openly recognised and the central aim of the project is not knowledge in itself (in a "pure" research sense) but information which may provide insights from which practice can be changed and improved. Therefore, the limitations in the external validity are not in themselves disastrous to the project.

The questionnaire element of the research can be said to be internally reliable in that respondents are all asked the same questions thereby providing consistency in the collection of data.

The same is true of the interview schedules. The fact that the interviews allow for interviewees to go beyond the common questions asked limits internal reliability in the sense that a different "treatment" is being applied to different members of the sample. However, this is a necessary feature of the interview if we are to obtain explanatory information to supplement the descriptive data drawn from the questionnaire. If there was to be absolute internal consistency in the interview format, then all we would have would be an orally conducted questionnaire which would negate the purpose of the interviewing part of the research.

The learner speech section of the data collection is internally reliable in that the same listener hears and analyses the data under the same conditions. The learner utterances are not wholly internally reliable insofar as there is a choice element in what the learners say, meaning that the data varies from subject to subject. However, the utterances are of the same *type*, which means that reliability is not importantly compromised. Moreover, if the utterances were identical, there would be a problem resulting from the fact that the listener would become familiar with what was being said. She would therefore not be making judgements of later speakers' intelligibility from the same position of ignorance of what was being said as for earlier speakers.

External reliability is a greater problem. On the one hand, the research could be replicated in the sense that the same questions could be asked and the same procedures

followed with a different sample by a different researcher. However, the fundamentally non-scientific nature of the research does not allow us to conclude that similar results would confirm the original research or that different results would repudiate it. The perceptions and opinions of a given group of teachers and learners are precisely that – *perceptions* and *opinions*, not externally falsifiable *knowledge* in the sense used by Karl Popper (Magee, 1973). That other subjects might have different perceptions and opinions is not a weakness in the research but, rather, a reality which recognises that no two people are identical. Likewise, the ability of one listener to understand learner speech is likely to vary from that of a second listener.

These limitations to the external reliability of the research would only be a problem if it were being claimed that the research was "pure", "scientific" or "experimental". None of these claims are being made, so the absence of this type of reliability need not be a major concern to us.

Wherever possible, checks and balances are built into the data collection and analysis methodology. For example, major discrepancies between the questionnaire and interview findings might alert us to problems in the methodologies used. Learner participants are drawn from a range of ages and language learning backgrounds. Teacher respondents and interviewees are drawn from native- and non-native speakers, including more and less experienced teachers with a range of teaching backgrounds. It is not claimed that either learner or teacher participants are in any way statistically "representative" of their general populations, but neither are they drawn from groups which are clearly unrepresentative in any obvious way.

5.13 Conclusions
In conclusion, my argument is that methodologies cannot be simply judged against ideal yardsticks or templates. As McDonough and McDonough (1997: chapter 4) point out, qualitative and quantitative approaches to research have their own strengths and weaknesses which are inherent in their design and the kind of questions they seek to answer.

By and large, traditional numerical designs are good on objectivity, reliability, falsifiability and replicability...Qualitative approaches are good on interest, sensitivity, context-specificity and validity. (page 69)

It follows that the choice of methodology should be based on the nature of the research questions a given project seeks to answer. My contention is that the methodology of data collection and analysis in this study is based on just such a principle.

In the next chapter I will present and describe the data obtained as a result of the use of the methods, techniques and instruments outlined above.

Chapter Six

The Research Findings: questionnaires and interviews

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I have explained the methodology used to conduct the present research. In this chapter I will describe the findings of the teacher and learner questionnaires and interviews. In the first two sections of the chapter I examine teachers' and learners' responses to the questionnaires and in the third and fourth sections I will look at the perceptions and opinions expressed in the interviews with smaller groups of teachers and learners.

6.2 The Teacher Questionnaire

6.2.1 Introduction

In this section I will consider a survey conducted amongst teachers of French to anglophone adults. The survey was conducted in May 2001 and looked at teachers' evaluation of which areas of French phonology posed problems for their learners. Twenty five sets of questionnaires, accompanied by a covering letter (see page 76 above) were distributed to teachers of French to adults in East Sussex. Sixteen questionnaires were returned (i.e. a 64 per cent. return rate) and these form the basis of the analysis which follows. Clearly, the data is extremely limited both in its quantity and geographical spread. Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe that the teachers who responded are atypical of the general population they were chosen to represent and therefore the information obtained may be valuable, as much for the questions it poses as for those it may answer.

A sample completed teacher questionnaire follows.

Please indicate which of the following features of French pronunciation cause difficulties for your learners by placing a tick in the appropriate column. In some cases you may wish to tick more than one column. If so, please explain your decision.

	1 Very serious difficulties	2 Serious difficulties	3 Slight difficulties	4 No difficulties
Individual sounds			✓	

Please give examples   Words such as 'vin' 'fun'.

Stressed syllables within words   ✓

Please give examples   those read as English.

Liaison   ✓

Please give examples   do not always remember to use liaison.

Elision   ✓

Please give examples   always pronounce every syllable.

Stressed syllables within phrases   ✓

Please give examples   tend to stress words as in English.

Intonation   ✓

Please give examples   pronounce as a question when making a statement, especially in answer to a question.

If you would like to make any more comments about your experiences teaching French pronunciation to adult English speaking learners, please continue over the page.

Sample 6.1 Completed teacher questionnaire.

6.2.2 Summary of teacher responses to questionnaire on learner difficulty

Teachers were asked to indicate which phonological categories caused difficulties for their learners and the severity of those difficulties. Some respondents did not answer for all categories, which is why in some cases there are not sixteen recorded responses

	Very serious difficulties	*Serious difficulties*	*Slight difficulties*	*No difficulties*
Individual sounds	4	6	6	-
Stressed syllables within words	1	-	11	3
Liaison	-	3	10	2
Elision	2	4	9	-
Stressed syllables within phrases	-	4	10	-
Intonation	3	3	6	2

Table 6.1 Summary of teachers' responses on learner difficulties.

We can try to obtain an overall impression of how the teachers as a group perceived problems and their severity by allocating "points" to answers. Although this may not be a very "scientific" approach it does allow us to put the individual responses together to obtain some sort of general overview. Given the non-numerical nature of the scale used in the survey and the fact that the responses indicate individual teacher's impressions rather than statistically measurable data, the results obtained should be regarded as indicative rather than constituting a definitive corpus of evidence. In short, they are "descriptive statistics".

If we give three "points" for each "very serious difficulties", two for "serious difficulties" and one for "slight difficulties" we arrive at the following "rankings".

Individual sounds	30
Elision	23
Intonation	21
Stressed syllables within phrases	18
Liaison	16
Stressed syllables within words	14

Table 6.2 Teachers' "ranking" of areas of difficulty.

The examples given by the teachers and their comments make interesting reading. All sixteen respondents gave examples of individual sounds which caused difficulties. Within this category, fifteen mentioned nasal vowels, generally or via specific examples (e.g. *-ain/-aine*, *don/donne*). Four cited the phoneme /y/, two noting difficulties in its production in general and two commenting on learner confusion between /y/ and /u/. Two mentioned /R/. Two referred to learner problems with "words which are the same in English", citing *qualité* and *magnétique* as examples. The fact that these responses appeared under the category of "individual sounds"(rather than "stressed syllables within words") suggests that the problem was probably one of transfer of English phonemes (rather than stress patterns) in cognate words. One respondent commented on each of the following: a vowel phoneme confusion in the words *du/de/des*; confusion between /e/ and /ɛ/; confusion in the pronunciation of words such as "ville" and "fille" (presumably a reference to the two different pronunciations of the letters "ll" as /l/ or /j/).

Intonation in question formation was mentioned by four respondents with specific reference to questions where the word order is as for an affirmative sentence - *Il a mangé des croissants?* One teacher commented that learners sometimes use a rising intonation to give an affirmative response to a question which has been asked using rising intonation.

Two teachers gave examples of the type of word or phrase where learners failed to make elisions and another respondent commented that "they (i.e. learners) feel they should pronounce every syllable".

Liaison was seen as a problem insofar as learners had difficulty remembering the rules of when to use it. Three teachers commented that their learners over-used liaison, specifically referring to the word *et* where liaison should not occur.

Five comments were made about learners applying English word stress to French words, with *consommateur*, *château*, *télévision* and *température* given as examples. Two respondents who did not give examples of words did however comment that the problem usually occurred with "words that you find also in English" (i.e. cognates). Interestingly only two teachers offered comments on their learners' problems with stressed syllables within phrases (and these remarks were very vague and general – "tendency to intone as in English", "tend to stress words as in English"), even though this was the fourth most problematic area overall and all of the teachers had indicated at least slight difficulties for their learners.

A possible explanation of this apparent paradox is that suprasegmental features of phonology are often more difficult to describe than individual sounds. Thus, teachers may have been able to identify that something was wrong with the rhythmic patterns of their learners' speech without being able to pinpoint or describe just what the problem was. This difficulty of description is discussed by Taylor (1993: 1) with specific reference to intonation, but also touching on sentence stress, and the vagueness of the comments cited above seems to bear him out. Although the teachers offered their responses under the rubric of "stressed syllables within phrases", their comments could equally be intended to discuss intonation or stressed syllables within single words.

6.3 The Learner Questionnaire

6.3.1 Introduction

Simultaneously with the survey of teachers' views, learners were questioned about their opinion of which features of French pronunciation posed difficulties for them. One hundred and fifty sets of questionnaires were distributed via the teachers who had participated in the survey. The questionnaires were accompanied by a covering letter (see page 76 above). Sixty one completed questionnaires were returned, i.e. a return rate of forty per cent.

As with the teacher survey, this clearly represents a very limited data base. Nevertheless, the responses give some information about the perceptions of learners and provide information which allows us to consider the level of agreement on the subject between teachers and learners in a restricted setting.

The first set of questions was identical to those asked of the teachers (see page 81), with the exception that the phrase "cause your learners difficulties" was replaced by "cause you difficulties" and the "any other comments" wording. The purpose of these questions was to discover if teachers and learners identified the same aspects of French pronunciation as being problematic.

A sample completed learner questionnaire follows.

Please indicate which of the following features of French pronunciation cause you difficulties when you speak by placing a tick in the appropriate column. In some cases you may wish to tick more than one column. If so, please explain your decision.

	1 Very serious difficulties	2 Serious difficulties	3 Slight difficulties	4 No difficulties

Individual sounds   3

Please give examples   nasal vowels

Stressed syllables within words   4

Please give examples

Liaison   4

Please give examples Knowing when words can have sounds extended.

Elision   3

Please give examples

Stressed syllables within phrases   4

Please give examples

Intonation   2

Please give examples Intonation in questions.

If you would like to make any more comments about your experiences learning French pronunciation, please continue over the page.

Sample 6.2 Completed learner questionnaire.

111

6.3.2 Summary of learner responses on areas of difficulty

As in the teacher survey, the learners were asked to indicate which phonological categories of French caused them difficulties and to estimate the degree of difficulty. As with the teachers, a glossary in the covering letter accompanying the questionnaire helped respondents in their interpretation of the categories of phonological description. Not all learners answered for all categories, so the responses do not necessarily add up to sixty one, the total number of respondents.

	Very serious difficulties	Serious difficulties	Slight difficulties	No difficulties
Individual sounds	1	7	35	13
Stressed syllables within words	1	1	32	21
Liaison	1	2	21	30
Elision	1	5	28	19
Stressed syllables within phrases	5	1	24	25
Intonation	8	2	12	32

Table 6.3 Summary of learner responses on areas of difficulty.

If we apply the same "points system" as for the teacher survey (i.e., three "points" for "very serious difficulties", two for "serious" and one for "slight") we find the categories ranked as follows:

Individual sounds	52
Elision	41
Stressed syllables within phrases	41
Intonation	40
Stressed syllables within words	39
Liaison	28

Table 6.4 Learners' "ranking" of areas of difficulty.

If we then compare the teachers' and learners' ranking of difficulty for the various categories, the following picture emerges:

	Teachers' ranking of degree of difficulty	Learners' ranking of degree of difficulty
Individual sounds	1	1
Elision	2	2
Intonation	3	4
Stressed syllables within phrases	4	2
Liaison	5	6
Stressed syllables within words	6	5

Table 6.5 Comparison of teachers' and learners' "ranking" of areas of difficulty.

For both sets of respondents individual sounds were considered the most serious cause of difficulty by a considerable margin based on the "points" system used here.

One interesting feature emerging from the comparison of responses is the great similarity between teachers' and learners' views of which features of French phonology cause the greatest difficulty. I will return to this point at a later stage in the subsequent discussion of the research findings.

Within the category of individual sounds, the most common comment concerned nasal vowels, remarked on by fourteen respondents out of the thirty one who gave examples for this feature. Some respondents commented simply that nasal vowels were a source of difficulty, others went into more detail. Two learners noted the difficulty of distinguishing between nasal and oral vowels, whilst two others mentioned the problem of distinguishing between the nasal vowels themselves. One learner mentioned /œ̃/, ("brun"), /ɑ̃/ ("sans vent") and /ɔ̃/ ("bon"), but not /ɛ̃/. Another learner remarked, rather puzzlingly, on a difficulty with the "difference between *dans* and *en*", whereas in fact both words have the same nasal vowel sound – /ɑ̃/.

The second largest number of learner comments came, interestingly, on an area which had only been mentioned once in the teacher survey. Ten respondents indicated, explicitly or via examples of "problem words", a difficulty with the semi-vowels /j/ and/or /ɥ/. This problem was particularly grave when the semi-vowels appeared alongside the vowel /œ/. Problem words cited included:

ailleur	/ɑjœR/
vieille	/vjɛj/
veuille	/vœj/
feuille	/fœj/
accueil	/ɑkœj/
ennuyeux	/ɑ̃nɥjœ/
lui	/lɥ/
bruyant	/bRɥijɑ̃/
oeil (twice)	/œj/
cercueil	/sɛRkœj/
réveil	/Revɛj/

Four learners gave *août* as a problem. This is possibly down to orthography rather than pronunciation. Although there appears to be a bewildering combination of vowels at the start of the word its pronunciation is in fact very simple - /u/ or /ut/.

Problems which were mentioned three times or twice included the phonemes /R/ (three) /y/ and /ɲ/ and the difference between /e/ and /ɛ/ in their spelt forms *é* and *è* (twice each).

Comments on the other aspects of French phonology featured in the questionnaire were much less frequent. Six learners noted a difficulty with knowing when liaison should and should not occur. In other words, the problem was perceived as being *when* this particular feature should occur rather than with its articulation.

Stressed syllables in words were noted as a problem by three learners, one of whom indicated a particular difficulty "where the word is spelt the same as in English", whilst the other two cited *charitable* and *impossible* (i.e. two more cognates) as examples.

Whilst stressed syllables within phrases were seen as a problem area, only three learners offered comments (one to say: "I am not aware of this..."). A more revealing insight came from the respondent who remarked "I tend to lapse into the English system of stress, e.g. 'il conTINue' or 'la démonSTRAtion'". Although these are, strictly speaking, examples of word stress rather than stress within phrases, they do offer an interesting insight into this particular learner's awareness of the differences between English and French and the influence this has on his/her pronunciation.

Insofar as learners did comment on suprasegmental aspects of French phonology, many of the remarks echoed those from the teacher respondents cited in the previous section.

6.4 Conclusions

Comparing teacher and learner responses, the most striking feature is the high level of agreement on the features of French phonology causing most difficulty. The two groups have an extremely similar ranking of areas of difficulty and both teachers and learners focus on nasal vowels as the individual sounds causing particular problems. However, whilst several learners identified the semi-vowels /j/ and /ɥ/ in conjunction with /œ/ as a major problem, this was only mentioned by a single teacher in the questionnaire responses.

Both groups agreed in not only identifying segmentals (i.e individual phonemes) as the area of greatest difficulty but also in making far fewer comments on suprasegmental features. This tends to reinforce Taylor's view (Taylor 1993: 1), cited previously, that one of the problems of teaching and learning suprasegmental features of phonology is the difficulty of describing these areas in a clear way. If awareness of the features themselves is underdeveloped, then teaching and learning is likely to lag behind those areas which can be easily identified and described.

It is worth asking whether the high degree of teacher-learner agreement can be ascribed to teacher influence on learners. If the teacher has said enough times that a certain feature is particularly difficult, then might not learners "believe the experts" and repeat the opinion as their own? Whilst we cannot entirely discount this possible explanation, it cannot account for differences such as the learner comments on /j/, /ɥ/ and /œ/, which did not appear to figure highly in teachers' concerns.

6.5 Teacher Interviews

6.5.1 Introduction

The rationale for the methodology used for devising the content and conduct of the interviews is explained above in chapter five. The background of the interviewees is outlined above in the chapter on the context of the research.

To recap briefly, the purpose of interviewing a small number of teachers of French to English-speaking adults was to facilitate the gathering of richer, more explanatory data than could be obtained by means of the questionnaires. The semi-structured interview format allows interviewees to expand on themes proposed by the interviewer, introduce additional ideas of their own and participate in a *two-way* exchange of information and ideas with the interviewer in a way not permitted by the questionnaire format.

Eight teachers, with a range of backgrounds and experiences, were interviewed over an eight day period in June 2001. The interview guidelines are included on page 85 above. The account of the interviews that follows is loosely grouped around themes suggested by each stage of the interview guidelines. Reported comments and direct quotes are attributed to interviewees by the upper-case letters used to identify the participants in chapter five (page 97 above).

6.5.2 Interview theme 1: terminology for describing pronunciation

A majority of the interviewees had problems at some point in the interview with understanding or using the terminology used to talk about pronunciation. This was despite the fact that they had all recently completed the questionnaire which included a gloss of terms used. One interview started as follows:

Q: "I want to ask you about your experiences of teaching French phonology to English speaking learners."

A: "Can you explain exactly what you mean by phonology. Is it the same as phonetics?" (Teacher D)

Several interviewees seemed to be unclear about the difference between stress and intonation. In particular, "intonation" was used by three interviewees when, in fact, they were talking about stress (either within a word or within a phrase).

All of the interviewees, when asked about problem areas for their learners, started by talking about individual phonemes and had to be drawn by the interviewer into discussion of suprasegmental features. One teacher spoke at some length (about fifteen minutes) about the importance of stress and rhythm, but this appeared to be almost an afterthought. In fact, the remarks on these suprasegmental aspects of phonology were only begun while the interviewer was looking for a new tape. One can only wonder if the remarks would have been made at all had there been no need to change the cassette! We may also wonder whether the much greater prominence given to individual phonemes by most of the interviewees was due to the fact that they genuinely considered them to be more important or whether they felt unconfident talking about suprasegmentals due to the greater difficulty of describing them.

6.5.3 Interview Theme 2: learner background and pronunciation

A description of adult language learners both generally and in the research context appears in chapter five on pages 99-100. The teachers were asked about the personal and learning backgrounds of their students to ascertain whether they (i.e. the teachers) felt there was any connection between learner backgrounds and pronunciation.

Previous learning experience was not felt to be a factor in phonological ability. Three tutors commented that students who had learned French for several years at school (especially those who had learned using grammar translation methods) were often more able to assimilate structural patterns but this was not transferable to pronunciation skills. Neither did the amount of time spent in France seem to influence phonological ability:

"I think they reach a level of pronunciation when they can get by and don't want to improve any further...It [i.e., the learner's pronunciation]...stays where it is." (Teacher D)

Age, however, was felt to be an issue by two interviewees:

"Some pensioners have difficulty to reproduce sounds...I think age is important especially if they have ear problems." (Teacher F)

and

"I think it varies on the age. The younger ones seem to be able to correct themselves and pronounce the same word a bit better if corrected."
Why do you think this is?"
"They have better hearing. They are more receptive." (Teacher A)

Perhaps the most surprising comment on anglophone learners' French pronunciation skills came from the teacher who commented:

"Usually I find that Scottish people have no problem with pronunciation for example they can do the French /R/ sound." (Teacher B)

What makes this unusual is that the "rolled" Scots /r/, whilst it partly resembles the /R/ sound common in the Roussillon region of France (a "flapped" /R/, similar to Spanish or Catalan /R/), has little articulatory similarity with the /R/ sound of standard French which is pronounced with the back of the tongue. It may be more significant that Scots English pronounces /r/ in all word positions (think of a Scottish person saying "drink" or "water") like French /R/ but unlike standard British English /r/, which is never pronounced in word final position (e.g.,"water") and sometimes omitted in word-medial position (e.g. "iron").

6.5.4 Interview theme 3: teacher estimates of learner intelligibility

All of the interviewees felt that, even though standards of pronunciation varied within their groups, the learners were nearly always intelligible. Comments ranged from "I can understand everything they say. It's very rare that I have to ask them to repeat" (Teacher A) to "Most of them...are fairly OK" (Teacher D). The most positive comment came from one teacher (a French native-speaker), who explained: "My mother came to one of my classes. She understood them and she doesn't speak a word of English" (Teacher E).

However, this last observation does raise the question of whether a standard of pronunciation which is good enough to be understood in a classroom situation will be sufficient for intelligibility outside the classroom when the listener is not a teacher. Only the teacher quoted above felt confident that her learners would be equally intelligible in authentic communicative situations with non-teacher, non-English speaking French speakers. The following observations were typical.

"I think that after so many years of teaching we have an inbuilt skill at understanding what they are saying. Otherwise, it might be much more difficult...Also, for us, it's in the context of a lesson, so there are only a certain number of words to choose from." (Teacher G)

" Most of the time I can understand them because it's in the context. You know what the question is so you can understand the answer."
"What if you were a serveuse or a vendeuse who didn't know any English?"
"Then I think it might be more difficult." (Teacher F)

Another teacher made the following observation based on her experience.

Q: "How intelligible do you think your students are?"

A: "In a classroom situation I know what they are going to say...whereas my Open University students have to record themselves on a tape talking for three minutes on a topic...I can listen and listen again and I still can't work out what they're trying to say...That happens with some regularity." (Teacher A)

These remarks echo Kenworthy's opinion (1987:20) that teachers may often not be the best judges of the intelligibilty of learners' pronunciation where the goal of learning is to use the language communicatively in a target language environment. This point of view, which is supported both in the literature on the subject (e.g. Kenworthy) and by the quotes above from practising teachers is reflected in the methodology for listening to learner pronunciation in the present research through the use of an "independent listener".

6.5.5 Interview Theme 4: sources of phonological difficulty for learners

When asked to identify the features of the French phonological system which caused problems for their learners the interviewees broadly duplicated the information that had been supplied by the larger group of teachers in their questionnaire responses. As with the questionnaire, the interviewees concentrated on individual phonemes, only two offering opinions on suprasegmental features without the prompting of the interviewer.

Nasal vowels, the /R/ phoneme, /e/ versus /ɛ/ and /y/, both in its own right and in contrast to /u/, were all identified by several teachers as being problematic. Also remarked on were the tendency of anglophones to aspirate /t/, /d/ and /p/ and to pronounce /e/ like the English diphthong /eɪ/. Whereas learner difficulty with the semi-vowel /j/ (particularly in word-final position) had been barely mentioned in the questionnaire, it was mentioned by a number of the interviewees as a serious difficulty for their students.

A sample of comments from all eight interviewees follows.

On nasal vowels: "Nasal vowels can be difficult for them. They're not used to them. They're not known to the English learners." (Teacher C)

"It's mainly the vowels, the nasals." (Teacher D)

"/ɔ̃/ and /ɑ̃/. They are sounds that don't exist in English. They are not used to produce (sic) these sounds." (Teacher H)

Interestingly, one teacher noted two quite distinct difficulties for her learners.

"There are two things with nasal vowels. Sometimes they confuse them, especially /ɑ̃/ and /ɛ̃/, 'maman' and ma main'. Sometimes they don't pronounce them as nasal vowels at all, they say 'j'ai femme' instead of j'ai faim'". (Teacher F)

On /R/:

"The /R/ sound is difficult. They could say it on its own, but when it's combined with other letters it's difficult for them."
" Does it seem to be more difficult in any particular position in words?"
"When it's in the middle...Rouge is alright...Orange is OK...Brun is more difficult...Vert is hard for them...It's most difficult at the end." (Teacher C)

"/R/ is obviously a problem. They pronounce it like an English /R/ or they roll it." (Teacher E)

On /e/ and /ɛ/:

"/e/ and /ɛ/, especially when it's in words written with accents - "é" and è". They also seem to have a problem with the future and conditional endings –"ai" and "-ais", whether they should pronounce it /ɛ/ or /e/." (Teacher B)

On /y/ and /u/:

"They usually say /u/ instead of /y/." (Teacher H)

"/y/ and /u/, although, strangely enough, I've had some students who seem to find it easy to say /y/, when they really concentrate, and they use it instead of /u/." (Teacher B)

On /j/ in word-final position:

"The sound /j/ at the end of a word. They have trouble with a word like *ail, grenouille, écureuil*." (Teacher C)

On aspiration:

"They 'explode' the sounds /t/, /d/ and /p/." (Teacher E)

Much less was said by the interviewees regarding suprasegmental features of French phonology. As mentioned above, there appeared to be considerable confusion about the metalanguage used to discuss these aspects of pronunciation, with "intonation" being used to describe "stress". This was evident even with the two teachers who volunteered views without being pressed by the interviewee.

"The biggest problem is intonation. For example, instead of 'Champs ElySEES' they say 'Champs ElYsées'. It doesn't prevent me understanding what they say in short bursts of speech, but it can be more difficult if they want to say more than a few words." (Teacher B)

"And then there's intonation."
"Would you like to talk about that?"
"I think it's more important than pronunciation. If you think of a person like Charles De Gaulle speaking English, the balance of his sentences is completely French. You have to try to get his balance and then try to work out every individual word. And by that time, you've lost it. I often think that, instead of going into so many details, I should tell them [i.e. learners] to throw their intonation, their stress, to the end of the word, especially three syllable words. They can say 'démissioNÉ' as a word, or 'environneMENT', but in a sentence they say 'déMISSioné' or 'enVIRonnement' or 'autoMAtique'…If that's done regularly, you don't understand them. And people who've done years and years of French still do it." (Teacher A)

Thus far, this section of my commentary on the teacher interviews has covered, albeit in more detail, similar ground to the questionnaire responses. However, a major purpose of the interview was to probe not only *what* teachers considered to be problem areas, but *why* they thought that this was the case. A number of causes were put forward: failure to recognise at an auditory level particular aspects of the French phonological system; problems with the physical articulation of particular phonemes; interference of the first language (i.e. English) phonological system; problems in producing features of French phonology as part of connected speech; and the influence of orthography on pronunciation. The interviewees did not always agree with each other in their comments. In what follows, I will mostly limit myself to reporting what was said, rather than offering my own opinion on some of the more contentious points. A fuller discussion of many of these points can be found in chapter eight.

One interviewee suggested that her learners "can't hear the difference between /ɔ̃/ and /ɑ̃/. " (Teacher H). Another teacher saw it differently: "They can easily recognise the difference between /ɔ̃/ and /ɑ̃/, but even the advanced students have difficulty to make a clear difference between /ɔ̃/ and /ɑ̃/ in the middle of a sentence because they are concentrating on other things." (Teacher B)

As noted above, many of the interviewees saw the non-existence of certain phonemes in English as a principal cause of difficulty. The unfamiliarity of two similar but not identical sounds (the only significant difference being the greater lip rounding, and therefore articulatory tension, of /ɔ̃/ in *bon* compared to /ɑ̃/ in *banc*) could plausibly explain difficulties both in perception and production of these nasal vowels.

With regard to a different pair of phonemes (/y/ and /u/), another teacher argued that "It's not the hearing that's at fault, it's getting their tongue round it. Minimal pairs, for example *du* and *doux*, they can generally recognise but not produce." (Teacher D)

Two interviewees offered a more general explanation for learner difficulties with French vowels in general.

"The mouth has to move in French – *du* /dy/, *de* /də/, *des* /de/, *deux* /dø/. You can't mutter in French like you can in English. Each sound has to be clear and different." (Teacher B)

"They don't move their mouths. /dy/, /də/, /de/, it all sounds the same. It's 'mushy-mashy' in the middle." (Teacher D)

These are rather forthright echoes of Delattre (1951: 17), Carton (1974: 42) and Bras (1975: 27) all of whom stress the muscular energy required to correctly pronounce French vowels.

The other key point raised by the second interviewee cited above is the fact that learners are faced with extra difficulties when it comes to producing "problem sounds" as part of connected speech. There seem to be two issues here. First, a physical problem of articulation. If the learner's mouth is at rest, he/she is more likely to be able to produce an unfamiliar sound than if his/her speech organs are already in motion and have to be reconfigured. This appears to be the case with the varying degrees of difficulty posed by /R/ according to its position in a word. Secondly, there may be a cognitive factor. If the learner is producing longer utterances of connected speech, his/her attention must also focus on other language systems, namely his/her choice of lexis and grammatical structure, if the utterance is to be communicatively successful. A kind of "overload" seems to occur, in which features of phonology, which can be produced in isolation, are "lost" due to the other linguistic demands on the learner.

According to the interviewees, the transfer of features of the English phonological system is a major cause of difficulty. This includes pronouncing French /R/ as English /r/, aspirating /t/, /d/ and /p/ and applying English stress patterns to French words and phrases, examples of which have been given above.

Not surprisingly, this influence of the first language system is seen as being particularly strong where the word itself is a French/English cognate.

"They pronounce written 'th' as /θ/, particularly when it's in a word like *théâtre* which is the same in English." (Teacher H)

"They put the English stress system on French words."
"Do they do that with all words?"
"The weaker learners do it all the time, the better ones only do it when the English interferes." (Teacher D)

What these teachers seem to be saying is that cognate words are a double-edged sword. Whilst it is easy for learners to recognise and remember their meaning, from the point of view of pronunciation they constitute an area of particular difficulty precisely because of their orthographic resemblance to their English language counterpart.

The influence of orthography on learners' pronunciation was also highlighted by several teachers. This influence was felt to operate through two distinct channels. First, the attempt by learners to impose the orthographic/phonological relationships of English onto their pronunciation of French. Secondly, an incomplete understanding of the "rules" relating spelling and pronunciation within French itself.

The former of these was felt to explain some of the problems with cognate words noted above: "Any word that looks English, they pronounce like an English word", was how one interviewee put it. Another teacher had even attempted to spell French words "à l'anglaise" in an attempt to treat mispronunciation:

"Sometimes if you spell the word à l'anglaise, they will have a better pronunciation than if you write it properly"
"Can you give me an example?"
"'Douche'. If you write it D-O-O-S-H...they can pronounce it better. I don't think it would be useful all the time, but just for words that they find difficult. Then take away the bad spelling when they have the sound and replace it with the good one. Not all of the time – only as a last resort." (Teacher C)

The complex relationship between French spelling and pronunciation was also thought to be responsible for learner mispronunciation. In some cases they were felt to be simply unaware of the system:

"If you say a new word they can imitate it. But they need to have it written down to practice during the week and then they lose the pronunciation." (Teacher D)

"When you write a word on the board, even when they know how to pronounce the word, there is a gap between the reading and the speaking. They can say it without seeing it, but when they read it...it's difficult for them to pronounce it as they know it." (Teacher E)

"It's connected to writing. They're not sure how to pronounce spellings that can be pronounced differently. They're not sure when 'll' is like 'ville' /vil/ and when it's like 'fille' /fij/. Invariably they pronounce 'ville' as /vij/. '-tie' as well. When it's /ti/ and when it's /si/, 'sortie' /ti/ and 'diplomatie' /si/." (Teacher B)

6.5.6 Interview Theme 5: is difficulty the same as unintelligibility?

Having discussed areas of phonological difficulty for learners, the teachers were then all asked whether the features they had identified as problematic were all causes of unintelligibility. It quickly emerged that the interviewees did not see those features which caused difficulty and the causes of unintelligibility as being identical groups.

Mispronunciation of /R/ was a case in point.

Q: "These things that you've identified as being difficult, do these things make the learners unintelligible?"
A: "Not really. 'Je voudrais', 'Rouge' [both pronounced with an exaggerated English /r/ instead of French /R/], I can understand that." (Teacher C)

Nasal vowels were felt to be more borderline.

"Sometimes they're a problem. If you're not expecting the word it can make them difficult to understand. If you can guess the English word it helps, but someone who didn't know English couldn't do that. And 'im-' or 'in-' (/ɛ̃/) in front of a word, making it negative If they pronounce them the English way, that can make it difficult to understand." (Teacher A)

"Usually I can understand because it's in the context. But I once had a student who said 'maman me fait mal' /mamã/ instead of 'ma main me fait mal' /mamɛ̃/, I think that might be more difficult." (Teacher F)

Liaison was an area where a number of teachers noted learner difficulty but felt that this did not necessarily cause breakdowns in communication.

"Sometimes they don't make a liaison with articles and nouns – 'les enfants' /le ãfã/. It annoys me! But it doesn't make understanding difficult." (Teacher E)

"It's a problem for the students when they're listening. They don't know how many words there are or where words begin and end. When they speak, they don't make liaisons, only in set phrases like 'nous avons' /nuzavɔ̃/. But when they make a more complicated phrase they build it up from separate words. It's very 'saccadé' [jerky]. It doesn't flow like real French. But I can still understand. It isn't a problem, but it's strange to listen to." (Teacher C)

Interestingly, although stress had been much less prominent than individual phonemes when teachers were discussing areas of difficulty for their learners, no less than three of them came back to stress (both word and sentence) as a major cause of unintelligibility.

"It doesn't prevent me understanding what they say in short bursts of speech , but it can be more difficult if they want to say more than a few words." (Teacher A)

"It's really amazing how difficult it is to understand if you put a stress on a wrong part of a word." (Teacher E)

And this anecdote from one of the French native-speakers, considering the problem from the other side of the linguistic coin.

"I was in Woolworths and I saw these French boys. Of course they didn't know I was Belgian. One of them said to me 'where's the exit?' [pronounced /egˈzit/]. And I couldn't understand him at all."
Q: "Why was that?"

"It was purely stress, the way he said /egˈzit/ instead of /ˈegzɪt/. He had to repeat himself a few times and then I only guessed because of the context." (Teacher B)

The significance of this story lies in the support it appears to give to the theory that features such as stress and intonation may have a more appreciable effect on intelligibility than the pronunciation of individual phonemes.

6.5.7 Interview theme 6: teaching French phonology

When the interviewees were asked about the features of French phonology they had taught in the preceding twelve months, all eight said they had worked with their classes on individual sounds and liaison but only four mentioned any teaching of stressed syllables within words or phrases. Five claimed to have taught intonation, but given the fact noted above that "intonation" was used by some interviewees instead of "stress" it is not altogether clear to which feature they were referring.

When questioned about whether pronunciation teaching was built into the year's scheme of work or was in response to perceived learner problems, six interviewees replied that it was integrated into the overall teaching programme and two said they only dealt with pronunciation "as it came up". The following sequence is from the transcript of one interview.

Q: "When you teach pronunciation is it something that's built into your scheme of work?"
A: "No, I pick it up immediately.
Q: "Do you have any plan for teaching pronunciation at the start of the year?"
A: "Never."
Q: "So it's always a response to problems and difficulties that arise?"
A: "Always." (Teacher D)

Where teachers talked about the planned pronunciation teaching they had done, all of them referred to individual phonemes and four mentioned liaison. Phonemes which had been part of planned teaching included nasal vowels, /y/ versus /u/, /e/ versus /ɛ/ and /R/. Teaching of liaison had involved explanations and practice of the rules concerning when liaison should and should not be made.

Two quite distinct methodological approaches to pronunciation teaching emerged in the interviews. On the one hand, a number of teachers adopted what might be called a "listen and repeat" strategy.

"Pronunciation should start with listening, so they can hear the difference between sounds before they pronounce them... I don't tell them how to move their mouths. I get them to listen to me and then imitate." (Teacher E)

On the other hand, some teachers, while accepting the importance of *recognising* sounds, felt that clear, explicit instruction on the use of the organs of speech was the key to successful teaching and learning.

"Most of the time they can recognise the sounds, but, even if you give two hundred examples, they won't be able to produce the sound because they don't know how to use their mouth...the position of the lips, tongue...chin...It's very difficult when students can't produce a sound just by repeating what they hear...They recognise the sounds but they just can't do it by repetition. They need tips about how to use their mouth." (Teacher C)

The role of correction in helping learners improve their pronunciation also revealed quite sharp differences. Some teachers felt that improvements in pronunciation would take place "naturally" through continuing exposure to correct models and large amounts of speaking practice.

"The most important thing is to boost their confidence, to get them to communicate. So I don't usually correct them too much as long as their speech is intelligible." (Teacher A)

Others felt that it was important to

"Demand a high standard early on…get an *un* /œ̃/ and get an *une* /yn/…Don't accept anything that's not as good as you want it…You're onto a loser if you let them get wrong ideas and wrong patterns of speech in their head." (Teacher D)

Ideas for teaching suprasegmental features were few and far between. At the level of recognition, suggestions did not go beyond "They need to be aware of the differences between the two languages." Whilst this is undeniably a starting point it is no more than that. Practice of the phonological features of connected speech seemed to consist of "reading aloud" (mentioned by three teachers). The only focus on phonology in this activity seemed to be via correction of learner error, which was just as likely to concentrate on segmental as suprasegmental features.

Whilst the relationship between French orthography and phonology was widely recognised to be a major difficulty for learners, there were few ideas on how to tackle the problem. One response, noted above, was to spell "problem" words "à l'anglaise". Another teacher said she used "'simplified phonetics' if it's a difficult word" (Teacher A). None of the interviewees taught their learners the phonemic alphabet or used it in their pronunciation teaching. Indeed, a number seemed to be unfamiliar with it themselves. The most positive response to questions about the possibility of using the phonemic alphabet was:

"I wouldn't mind. You don't have to do all the sounds together…You could do a few at a time: /y/ and /u/, /ɛ/ and /e/, /ø/ and /œ/." (Teacher B)

6.5.8 Interview Theme 7: published materials for pronunciation teaching

Awareness of published materials which could be used for pronunciation teaching seemed to be low. Teachers mentioned course books which they were using with their current groups or had used in the past. The most frequently mentioned were *French Experience* (Bougard and Bordais, 1994) and *France Extra* (Moys, 1985).

Feelings about the published materials used were mixed. *France Extra* was appreciated by one teacher as the only course book she had encountered which dealt systematically with stress and rhythm. One interviewee had this to say about *French Experience*.

Q: "Do you think it's helpful?"
A: " Yes and no. Not particularly. But I suppose it focuses you and concentrates them [i.e. the learners]. They think it's helpful." (Teacher B)

None of the interviewees were familiar with materials specifically written for the teaching and practice of French phonology. Neither had any of the teachers attempted to use CD Roms (either in a class setting or for individual work) to help their learners with French phonology.

A number of interviewees felt that learners would benefit from being able to hear models of native-speaker pronunciation, record themselves imitating the model, listen to themselves, listen to the model again and repeat this process as many times as they felt necessary. This model for pronunciation learning harks back to much of the work done in the past using language laboratories and is, in fact, one of the activities which can be done using published CD Roms such as *Breakthrough French* and *French Experience*.

Apart from using general course books, most of the interviewees had attempted to design their own activities and materials for teaching pronunciation, but had generally found this time-consuming and difficult. All of the teachers felt that it would be helpful to have more published materials available.

6.6 Learner Interviews

6.6.1 Introduction

As for the teacher interviews, the rationale for the content and procedures used in the learner interviews is explained in the chapter on methodology. The interviewees themselves are described in the chapter on the context of the research.

Eight learners with a range of backgrounds and experiences were interviewed over an eight day period in June 2001. The interview guidelines are included on page 85 above. Once again, the account of the interviews is grouped around the interview guidelines. As for the teachers, reported remarks and direct quotations are attributed using the upper-case letters used to introduce the learners in chapter five (page 97 above).

6.6.2 Interview theme 1: terminology for describing pronunciation

Like the teacher interviewees, the learners had recently completed the questionnaire and therefore were, on the whole, reasonably familiar with the metalanguage used to describe phonology. Two of the interviewees had obviously prepared quite thoroughly for the discussions and showed quite a good knowledge of the terminology used to describe suprasegmental features and even the phonemic alphabet. The remainder, like the teachers, seemed more comfortable talking about individual sounds than features such as stress, rhythm or intonation.

6.6.3 Interview theme 2: learner background and pronunciation

Of the older learners (which I have rather arbitrarily taken to mean those aged over fifty) all had learned French at school for periods varying from two to eight years. With one exception, all had concentrated on reading and writing and felt that their pronunciation had probably not been very good when their school learning of French concluded and had not provided them with any advantages when they resumed their studies as adults. The comments of the remaining interviewee offer an interesting insight into the possible differences between learners managing to imitate the sounds of French accurately and the challenge posed by pronunciation in "free" speech, when the learner is trying to process linguistic content as well as form.

"We did quite a lot of learning poems by heart and trying to pronounce them well. When you try to say things for yourself, you have to think about what you're saying. So I think that perhaps my pronunciation is worse now than when I was young." (Learner B)

These remarks echo some of the comments made by the teachers and also prefigure some of the learner comments on when they felt that their intelligibility tended to break down.

The three younger learners, aged between 18 and early forties, had learned French at school for between five and nine years and all felt that their pronunciation was quite good when they left school. Each interviewee, however, reported a very different experience.

One appeared to have learned (in the early 1970s) using broadly audio-lingual methods:

"He [i.e. the teacher] spoke French as much as he could – *'Faites attention!'* all the time!...I can remember the language labs we had at school...I think that was actually very good." (Learner F)

A second, who had learned in the early eighties, reported that:

"Most of the French we did at school for 'O' level was written. But both of my parents spoke fluent French and I think that helped me with my oral French and my pronunciation." (Learner E)

The youngest interviewee, who had been at school throughout the 1990s, described an unusual sounding language learning experience.

"I started learning French at school, it was a private school, when I was seven. Most of the emphasis was on reading and writing. We had vocabulary and grammar tests – everything! After that, I changed schools and the emphasis was on speaking." (Learner G)

Some learners had been taught at school by non-native French speakers only, others by a mixture of native- and non-native speakers. None of the interviewees felt that whether the teacher had been a native- or non-native speaker had significantly influenced the development of their pronunciation skills.

6.6.4 Interview theme 3: learner estimates of their own intelligibility

Seven of the eight interviewees were fairly positive about the level of intelligibility of their spoken French. "When I speak French in France, people seem to understand me" (Learner C) was one typical comment.

Another learner explained:

"I think my pronunciation is OK. It could be better though. I find that people understand me. I've had to use French at work [in a restaurant] quite a few times when we have French groups in ... and they can understand me quite well." (Learner G)

A third remarked:

"On the last few hitch hiking holidays I've had in France...I don't really think they have a problem understanding me." (Learner F)

The remaining learner was less confident:

"I used to think I had a very good accent. I'm a little unsure now, because when I speak French in France with French people, quite a few of them don't seem to be able to understand what I'm saying." (Learner E)

However, despite their general confidence, most of the interviewees also had reservations about the conditions in which their pronunciation was comfortably intelligible.

"My French speaking in France is usually limited to ordering food. I think people usually understand me. I sometimes talk to the ladies in cemeteries who feed the cats. They usually understand me as long as it's not too abstract. I don't know if that's my pronunciation or that I can't find the right words." (Learner B)

"I think my pronunciation would be fairly intelligible, but I can't put a whole sentence together. When I go to France I have to practice what I say before I say it. Then people can usually understand me." (Learner A)

"Generally I make myself understood in France, particularly if I use the words that I'm familiar with. When I diverse (sic) into the more complicated words...that you don't use in everyday life, then sometimes I have difficulty." (Learner H)

These remarks echo some of the observations made in the teacher interviews. The intelligibility of learner pronunciation is not a fixed quality. Rather, intelligibility varies with factors such as the familiarity of the lexis being used, the length of the utterance and the time available for "rehearsal" of the utterance.

6.6.5 Interview theme 4: sources of phonological difficulty for learners

As in the teacher interviews, the learner interviewees concentrated on the problems posed by individual phonemes rather than the suprasegmental features of French phonology. With the exception of two learners (a husband and wife, who might, therefore, have discussed the issues together) the phonological characteristics of connected speech were not mentioned by any of the interviewees.

In the learner questionnaire responses the most frequently mentioned phonemes which were perceived as a source of difficulty were the nasal vowels. Nasal vowels were also prominent as a problem area in the teacher interviews. Curiously, in the learner interviews nasal vowels did not feature strongly. Two learners did mention perceived inconsistencies in the sound/spelling relationship of the nasal "-en-", but this was seen as a difficulty in connecting orthography and phonology rather than a problem of either recognition or articulation.

There was a stronger correspondence between the learner questionnaires and interviews with regard to the phoneme /j/. This was the second most mentioned sound in the questionnaire and was also repeatedly referred to in the interviews with words such as *feuille* /fœj/, *portefeuille* /pɔRtfœj/, *vieille* /vjɛj/, *vieux* /vjø/, *mieux* /mjø/ and *meilleur* /mɛjœR/ all cited as "difficult", with one learner commenting: "When three vowels come together, like *feuille*, we don't really have that in English".

134

In fact, the learner is wrong. Although there are three "vowel letters", there is only one vowel phoneme in *feuille* (i.e. /œ/) and the semi-vowel phoneme /j/ does exist in English in words like *yes* /jɛs/ and *you* /juː/. Where there is a difference between French and English /j/ is in the orthographic representation of the sound and the word position in which it tends to be found. In English /j/ is usually represented by the letter *y* and it tends to occur in word-initial position. The only exception to these "rules" which comes easily to mind is "beautiful" which has three vowel letters and a /j/ sound: /ˈbjuːtifl/.

So, there may be two possible sources of difficulty with the examples cited by the interviewees. First, a cognitive problem of associating a familiar sound from the learner's first language with an unexpected orthographical representation. Secondly, an articulatory problem of producing a familiar sound in an unfamiliar word position when the speech organs are already in motion. Significantly, none of the learners seemed to have any problem with /j/ in either initial or medial position in French words such as *yeux* /jø/ *pied* /pjɛ/. Difficulty only seemed to occur where /j/ was either in word-final position or in association with the vowel phonemes /œ/ or /ø/.

Other phonemes mentioned as being potentially problematic were /R/ (mentioned by one learner), which was thought to be difficult to articulate, given that it does not exist in English; /e/ and /ɛ/ (mentioned by two learners), which were held to be easy to recognise but difficult to articulate as clearly different sounds; and /y/ and /u/ which one learner considered difficult to recognise and articulate as different sounds.

One interview spoke at length about his problem in distinguishing, both receptively and productively, between what he described as "short and long vowels". Examples cited included /a/ versus /ɑ/ (*patrie* and *château*), /ɪ/ versus /i/ (*finir* and *gîte*) and /ɔ/ versus /o/ (*botte* and *dos*).

"A word like *Place de la Concorde* (/plas/). I can hear the difference between *bath(* /bɑːθ/)and *bath (* /bæθ/) or *path* (/pɑːθ/) and *path* (/pæθ/). If someone comes from north of the Trent, that screams at me. But *Place* (/plas/) and *Place* (/plɑs/), I can't really tell the difference." (Learner B)

What is curious here is that all of the sounds referred to exist, as the interviewee recognises, in both English and French.

As mentioned above, only two of the interviewees volunteered comments on a suprasegmental aspect of the French phonological system, namely syllabification. The two learners in question were husband and wife and, interestingly, one thought that the rules for syllabification in French were easy whilst the other found them difficult.

"I know where you split words. You split words after the vowel and not the consonant. So it's 'ammo-nite' and not 'ammon-ite'." (Learner A)

"Syllabilisation (sic) is a difficult one. 'L'Association Napoléonienne du Boulonnais', for example. Where one part of the word ends and the next one starts." (Learner B)

Seven of the eight interviewees mentioned difficulties in relating the orthography of French to its pronunciation. Some of the remarks reflected the interference of the relation between spelling and sound in English which some learners superimpose onto French.

"I've heard people, even in the A-level group pronouncing "-ent" verb endings as /ɔ̃/.
Q: Why do you think they do that?
"Because it's not explained to them in the early days, they're not corrected in the early days...It's an easy thing to fall into...They're reading it as it's written." (Learner H)

Incidentally, this mispronunciation of "-ent" verb endings had been noted by one of the teacher interviewees as a potential cause of loss of intelligibility due to the fact that for the listener it confuses the grammatical status of the utterance by combining what appears to be a first-person plural verb form with a third-person plural subject pronoun.

Of course, this is a very incomplete explanation. "-ent" word endings in English (e.g. *went* or *spent* are pronounced /ɛnt/ not /ɔ̃/ and in French "-ent" would normally be pronounced /ɑ̃/, as in *accident* /aksidɑ̃/ however, it does seem to reflect a commonly stated remark from anglophone learners of French that the main difference between the two systems is that in English, unlike French, everything that is written is pronounced. We only have to think of words like *through* or *iron* to recognise the fallacy here. However, the point is not whether learners' opinions about English orthography and phonology are accurate but whether the opinions they do hold have an impact on their learning of French pronunciation and spelling.

This is reflected in the comments of the interviewee who said:

"You come across a few words and you think 'How do you say that?'…and it's quite different to how it's written down…When you say a word and the ending sound is cut off, like *gris* - /gRi/ - and you don't say the "s" on the end. You don't get that in English." (Learner G)

Another learner explained that:

"For me a key was always a /klɛf/."
Q: Why?
"Because that's how it's written. It was only after two or three years that I found out it was a /kle/." (Learner H)

The question of when to pronounce the consonant letters in word-final position was an area of difficulty for several learners:

"Why *le sac* /sak/ but *le tabac* /taba/? Why *le sud* /syd/ but *le nord* /nɔR/? Why *le serf* /sɛRf/ but *le cerf* /sɛR/? Why *le fils* /fis/ but *gris* /gRi/? Why *sept* /sɛt/ but *port* /pɔR/?" (Learner B)

Other interviewees raised further difficulties which can broadly be described as "same spelling-different sound".

"I find particularly difficult words that have "-er" at the end. Sometimes I think they should be pronounced /e/, like *boucher*, but sometimes it's /ɛR/, like *hiver*." (Learner D)

In other cases the issue was not *whether* but *how* to pronounce word-final written consonants. The following remark echoed a comment made by one of the teacher interviewees:

"One of the quirks is words spelt "-tie". Sometimes it's pronounced /si/, like *democratie*, but other times it's /ti/, like *partie*." (Learner B)

The "same spelling-different sound" issue also emerged in relation to nasal verbs.

"Why is it *Parisien* /ɛ̃/ and not *Parisien* /ɑ̃/, when *en* on its own is pronounced /ɑ̃/? And why do we say *le mien* /ɛ̃/ but *enfant* /ɑ̃/? And *inclinaison*. Why isn't the second "in" pronounced the same as the first?" (Learner D)

A review of learners' comments suggests that there may, in fact, be three separate factors operating in what can be described as orthographically induced pronunciation errors. First, an attempt to superimpose English sound-spelling relationships onto French pronunciation. Secondly, an inadequate knowledge of the rules relating the sound and spelling systems of French itself. Thirdly, genuine inconsistencies within the French system which must be learned on a piecemeal basis even by native speakers of the language.

6.6.6 Interview theme 5: is difficulty the same as unintelligibility?

Like the teachers, the learner interviewees distinguished between the features of French phonology which they found difficult and the factors which compromised the intelligibility of their speech. Although the learners had identified certain phonemes as sources of difficulty, most of them felt that on the occasions when their speech became unintelligible the causes lay at a deeper, more general level of language learning and use rather than being identifiable with the recognition or production of particular individual sounds.

As mentioned above, in the learners' opinion the over-riding reasons for unintelligibility could be found in the familiarity of the lexis being used, the length of utterance, opportunities for "rehearsal" before speaking and the problem of trying to use several language systems or skills simultaneously.

"It's generally single words, words that I don't use frequently. Very often, it's a word that I've looked up in a dictionary…You're using a word that you've read in a book, that you've never heard used in practice. And very often you can mispronounce those…Or you hear a new word once and it's a year before you have to use it, and in that time your perception of it has changed completely." (Learner H)

"I can usually pronounce individual words quite clearly, but if it's in the middle of a long phrase I'm trying to do too many things at the same time and I think the pronunciation goes by the board." (Learner D)

"If I practise what I'm going to say before I say it, then I don't think I have much difficulty making myself understood. But if I haven't got time to practise, I get all tongue-tied and the words don't seem to come out right." (Learner A)

Although the learners do not mention it, an additional explanation for the breakdowns in intelligibility in longer utterances might be found in the suprasegmental aspects of French phonology. A misuse of stress, rhythm or intonation, which might be "harmless" in the context of a single word or short phrase, may cause unintelligibility in a longer utterance.

Another possible cause might be the greater demands placed on the listener in listening to a longer utterance. The required concentration level has to be sustained for longer than when listening to a short utterance. Therefore pronunciation which may be comprehensible when heard in a short phrase may "overload" the listener when he/she has to decode a larger quantity of imperfectly pronounced language.

Furthermore, in many instances, whereas short utterances are very concrete or transactional, longer utterances are more abstract and therefore meaning may be more difficult for the learner to deduce in the absence of a clearly defined context.

Finally, to conclude this section, two interesting, although inconclusive, examples recounted by interviewees of occasions on which oral communication broke down.

"And then, all of a sudden, out of the blue, you can speak to somebody in French and they'll look at you blankly. For example, *une bière* [in my, opinion intelligible, but with the final /R/ slightly "underpronounced" – could the listener have "heard" *billet* /bijɛ/?]. One in twenty times I say it and they look at you as if you've come from Mars. And then you repeat it two or three times and you're away. I don't know why. Maybe it's my pronunciation." (Learner H)

"Once, when I was in France, I was trying to describe where I was staying and I said *tout près* and the French person seemed unable to understand me."
Q: Do you think the problem was with 'tout', or 'près', or both words?
"I really don't know" (Learner C)

In fact, the learner's pronunciation of *tout près* slightly diphthongised the vowels /u/

and /ɛ/, making them sound close to the English vowel phonemes /uə/ and /eɪ/.

Whether this was the cause of the communication breakdown we will, of course,

never know.

6.6.7 Interview theme 6: learning French phonology

All eight interviewees felt that learning pronunciation was equally as important as

learning vocabulary and grammar. Five learners felt that the time allocated to work on

pronunciation in their classes had been about right, while two felt that more attention

should be devoted to pronunciation of new lexis when it was first introduced:

"It would help to do more on how to say a word the first time you meet it…Possibly

I'd have liked to have worked on pronouncing new words that we learned over and

over again." (Learner E)

One interviewee initially said that he would like to do more work on pronunciation,

but when pressed on which language systems or skills he thought should occupy less

time in class, admitted that what he probably meant was that he would like to spend

more time learning all aspects of French!

Overall approaches to pronunciation learning varied considerably. The three main

tendencies could be described as listening-based, articulation-based and orthography-

based. Within the listening-based approaches there was a distinction between one

learner who seemed to favour acquisition (in a "Krashenite" sense) and another who

preferred a more conscious, learning orientation.

"Pronunciation is best learned by listening to someone who can speak the language
well…I expect my pronunciation has been picked up by listening, rather in the way
children pick up their first language." (Learner C)

"Hearing is important. I suppose I like a clear model. If someone speaks slowly and
clearly, I can try to imitate them." (Learner D)

The articulation approach was exemplified in the following remark:

"I think that a refresher on where you put your mouth for different words would probably be a good idea…because we don't move our mouths very much in English." (Learner E)

Two learners felt that greater knowledge of the relationship between orthography and phonology was needed if their pronunciation was to significantly improve. One commented that "I'm not very well-versed in phonetics and the explanations in the dictionary" (Learner H), whilst the second submitted a written note a couple of days after the interviews:

"I have found it very difficult to learn French sounds in the spoken language. I suppose the analogy would be someone learning the piano by ear and someone learning the piano by use of a written script or code, i.e. sheet music. This may be to do with my defective sense of pitch. (I have no ear for music, i.e., tone-deaf.) Thus I rely on trying to match the French words I read to my somewhat defective memory of French orthography and phonetics. I think if you can make an effort to learn the phonetics, it would be worth it."
(Learner B)

Six out of the eight learners claimed to have engaged in self-directed study to improve their pronunciation, although this varied greatly in content and quantity. Although these interviewees were keen to improve their pronunciation, the overall impression, with very few exceptions, was of disorientation in face of what was seen as a daunting task.

"Sometimes I read along with a very old *Linguaphone* thing I've got. Sometimes I read aloud from *A Vous La France* and I record myself. I don't really know what else to do." (Learner D)

"I say a new word I've learned over and over again and record it and play it back."
Q: Just words or phrases?

"Just single words." (Learner E)

"Sometimes I listen to recordings of speeches by General de Gaulle. I don't suppose that's terribly useful. It's rather rhetorical and declamatory. You couldn't really talk to people like that in everyday life." (Learner B)

"I've worked with a CD that came with a dictionary I bought. I listen to the sounds and repeat them."
Q: What sort of things are on the CD? Sounds? Words? Phrases?
"Just individual sounds. But I found it quite helpful." (Learner C)

Only one interviewee seemed to have a developed plan for improving his pronunciation through self-study.

"I've worked with the *French Experience* CD-Rom to work on my pronunciation. You listen. Then you repeat and record yourself. Then you listen to yourself. Then you listen to the original again. I found that very useful. You can compare your own pronunciation to the French person on the CD." (Learner H)

Interview theme 7: published materials for pronunciation learning

As with the teachers, the learners seemed generally unaware of published material which could help with their learning of French phonology. The interviewees were familiar with sections on phonology in the course books they had used but had not encountered any "specialised" published materials which could help them. The sections on pronunciation in the course books were felt to be helpful as far as they went but lacking in explanation, supporting audio material and practice activities.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the research findings in terms of the information obtained through questionnaires and interviews concerning teachers' and learners' perceptions of the areas of French phonology which cause difficulty and/or unintelligibility. The chapter has also provided evidence concerning attitudes and approaches to pronunciation teaching and learning along with teachers' and learners' views on published materials.

The implications of these findings will be considered in chapter eight. In the next chapter we will consider the outcomes of a study of learner pronunciation to see whether this supports or disagrees with teachers' and learners' perceptions of the causes of difficulty and breakdown in intelligibility.

Chapter Seven

The Research Findings: Listening to Learner Pronunciation

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present and discuss the results of my investigation into the pronunciation of a group of adult learners of French. My aim is to see whether the actual pronunciation of learners corresponds to the views expressed in the preceding chapters. Are the difficulties encountered the same as those predicted by applied linguists? Do teachers and learners have an accurate view of what constitute the main problem areas? Do the priorities of course materials address the features of French phonology which cause a breakdown in intelligibility when learners speak?

In chapter three I considered the criteria for successful pronunciation learning and concluded that *comfortable and acceptable intelligibility* was an appropriate goal for the overwhelming majority of adult language learners. To avoid irritating repetition, I will use *intelligibility* to express this idea in this chapter. In what follows I will be particularly interested in those instances where intelligibility breaks down. Therefore the analysis focuses on learner error, with *error* understood as pronunciation which is not intelligible to a non-teacher native-speaker of French.

First, I will recapitulate some of the most important features of the setting of this part of the research. Next, I will revisit the essential features of the language elicitation instruments used for data collection and the techniques used to analyse the learners' pronunciation. Finally, I will present the data itself.

7.2 The Setting

Thirteen adult learners of French participated in this part of the research, contributing samples of speech consisting of individual words, short phrases and more extensive pieces of language. The participants included seven male and six female learners, ranging in age from eighteen to mid-seventies. The learners were all following French courses taught by myself at GCE Advanced Level. All were first-language English speakers.

The "listener" was a locally resident native-speaker of French. As a non-language teacher, who had not met any of the learners, she therefore reasonably accurately represented French native-speakers whom the learners might encounter in a "real life" setting. The survey also met Kenworthy's condition for assessing intelligibility that "the ideal judges are listeners who have not had an abnormal amount of exposure to non-native speech nor any previous contact with the speakers being assessed." (1987: 20)

7.3 Methodology: data collection

Three elicitation instruments were used to stimulate learner speech.

In the first (see pages 87-88), ten learners were asked to pronounce one word from thirty seven groups of five words. Each group featured a different French phoneme. The learners chose one word from each group, thereby ensuring that the listener did not become familiar with the words being pronounced, which could influence her judgement of the intelligibility of what she heard. The learners were then asked to pronounce one word or phrase from six further groups. These groups exemplified the following features of French phonology

- French/English cognates and polysyllabic French words to discover if learners' intelligibility was affected by transfer of English word stress patterns to French.

- Short phrases to investigate the use of rhythm group stress.

- Words and phrases requiring liaison.

- Phrases in which elision would normally take place in the pronunciation of French native-speakers

- Structurally and lexically identical phrases in which intonation affects meaning (specifically, affirmation and interrogation).

The samples of learners' pronunciation were audio-recorded. The listener listened to each learner, stopping the tape after each word or phrase and writing down what she heard. The listening took place in two sessions on separate days in a quiet room in the

institution in order to minimise the possible effect of listener fatigue on assessment of intelligibility. Although the learners' speech was decontextualised and lacked the kind of non-verbal support (gesture, etc.) which characterises most authentic oral interaction, this seemed justified insofar as the purpose of the investigation was to examine the influence of *pronunciation* on intelligibility. Intelligibility would be measured quite simply by whether the listener wrote down the same word/phrase that the learner had spoken.

The second elicitation instrument consisted of two similar but slightly different pictures (page 89). Ten learners were asked to describe one of the pictures in about ten phrases. The learners were told that the listener would have both pictures and would attempt to decide which picture was being described. The learners were given a short preparation time to look up unfamiliar vocabulary required for the description. This was necessary in order to minimise the possibility that unintelligibility might result from non-phonological factors, such as incorrect lexis being used.

The listener listened to the learner's description, stopping the tape after each phrase. She then attempted to recreate an intelligible version of what the learner had said using the pictures as a contextualisation device. Having repeated this procedure for each phrase, the listener then attempted to decide which picture was in fact being described. The visual context made this activity closer to the conditions of authentic speech situations. At the same time the requirement for the learners to produce longer utterances allowed for the suprasegmental features of French to play a greater role than in the first activity. Intelligibility would be measured by two outcomes: first, how many phrases was the listener able to recreate with the aid of the pictures; secondly, was the listener able to decide correctly which picture was being described.

In the third instrument eight learners were audio-recorded reading aloud one extract each from Malécot (1977). The texts (pages 157-167 below) consisted of transcriptions of recordings made by Malécot of what he describes as "educated Parisians" talking about everyday topics and which were chosen for inclusion in his book for "leur caractère phonétique représentatif" (55). Each learner was allowed to choose his/her extract and then had a few minutes to look at it to ensure that the lexis and structures were understood. Once an extract had been used it was removed in

order to ensure that the same passage could not be chosen twice so that the listener's judgement was not affected by any familiarity with what she was hearing.

The procedure for listening was as follows. The listener listened to the cassette trying to understand the overall meaning of what she heard. When something was not immediately understandable she stopped the cassette and made a note of what she thought she heard. She then replayed the section and either confirmed or adjusted her note. This corresponds to the way in which, in a "real life" listening situation, a listener might ask the speaker to repeat what they have said. If the meaning was still not clear the listener noted this and continued. When the listening was complete the listener and myself returned to the sections where comprehensibility had broken down. The passage was listened to again *with the text* and discussion took place to try to resolve why the utterance was unintelligible. The listening to, and analysis of, the read-aloud texts took place in two sessions – two hours for the first five learners and one hour and ten minutes for the remaining three.

7.4 Methodology: analysing the data

In addition to determining how often intelligibility broke down, this study also attempted to analysis the sources of intelligibility problems. This analysis had to include two elements: first, in what proportion did particular features of French phonology contribute to intelligibility breakdown; secondly, could the features of the learners' pronunciation causing the intelligibility problem be described. This information would allow an evaluation of the views expressed in the preceding chapters and possibly provide ideas for the more effective teaching and learning of French pronunciation.

To describe the elements causing loss of intelligibility I have used the same categories as in previous chapters, namely individual sounds, word stress, group stress, intonation, liaison and elision. To analyse the ways in which the learners' pronunciation departs from that of native-speakers and causes intelligibility problems, I have referred to errors in the use of the suprasegmental features mentioned above and divided the problems caused by mispronunciation of individual sounds into three types: *sound substitutions*, where a different sound is substituted for the correct

phoneme (e.g., *mais* [/mɛ/] is heard instead of *mes* [/me/]); *sound deletions*, where the learner leaves out a sound (e.g., *poids* [/pwa/] is heard instead of *poire* [/pwaR/]); and *sound insertions*, where the learner adds a sound (e.g., *froid* [/fRwa/] is heard instead of *fois* [/fwa/]).

In the case of the "read-aloud" texts, the data is presented in the following way. The piece chosen by each learner is reproduced. Next, the listener's overall judgement of comprehensibility is reported. Then the "second listenings" are listed – both those where meaning was clarified and those where meaning remained unclear. Finally, a short commentary is offered.

Before proceeding to consider the results of the survey, it is necessary to note some of its limitations. The number of learners is small and may not therefore produce a significantly large corpus of evidence for the findings to be completely reliable. However, as with the other surveys, there is no reason to believe that the participants are in any way atypical of the learner body they represent. Aggregated data of the type resulting from the survey does not in itself tell us about the pronunciation learning needs of any individual learner or learner group. Rather it tries to provide an overall framework for this type of needs analysis. The data in this survey does not constitute a longtitudinal sample and therefore cannot give us information about changes over time in the intelligibility of the pronunciation of individuals or groups of learners. Instead it gives us a "snapshot" of the pronunciation of thirteen specific individual learners at a given moment. Finally, it should be recognised that statistical techniques have not been employed to test the reliability and significance of the data and analytical methods used.

7.5 Presentation of the Data
7.5.1 The first instrument: words and phrases in isolation

The samples of learner speech elicited in the first activity produced a total of 101 breakdowns in intelligibility out of 430 utterances. This figure includes 83 instances where the listener "heard" a different word or phrase to that which the learner was trying to say. In addition there were eighteen instances in which the listener was unable to write down any meaningful word or phrase to describe what she had heard.

Of the 83 cases where the listener "heard" a different word/phrase to that which the learner tried to say, nine can be ascribed with reasonable reliability to suprasegmental features, the remainder consisting of errors in individual sounds. A more detailed breakdown follows.

7.5.1.1 Sound Substitutions: vowels

Learner should have pronounced	Listener heard	Frequency
/e/	/ɛ/	6
carré	Calais	
ignorer	ignorait	
mes (twice)	mais (twice)	
les	laisse	
carré	craie	
/ɔ̃/	/ɑ̃/	5
rond	rendre	
son (twice)	sans (twice)	
oncle	encre	
oncle	angle	
/ɑ̃/	/ɔ̃/	4
sans	son	
fendre (twice)	fondre (twice)	
dent	donc	
/œ/	/ə/	2
coeur (twice)	que (twice)	
/ə/	/e/	1
te	tes	
/ɛ/	/e/	1
mais	mes	
/ɛ/	/ə/	1
lève	le	
/ɛ/	/œ/	1
dessert	deux heures	
/ɛ/	/i/	1
elle a raison	il a raison	
/o/	/ɔ/	1
beau	bord	

/ø/ peu	/ə/ de	1
/ã/ sans	/ɛ̃/ saint	1
/œ̃/ brun	/ɔ̃/ rond	1
/ɑ/ âme	/ɛ/ aime	1
/ɑ/ paille	/e/ paye	1
/ɑ/ bas	/a/ bar	1
/e/ dessert	/ø/ deux heures	1
/u/ chou	/o/ chaud	1

Table 7.1 Summary of sound substitutions: vowels.

7.5.1.2 Sound Substitutions: semi-vowels

Learner should have pronounced	Listener heard	Frequency
/w/ Louis	/ɥ/ lui	1

Table 7.2 Sounds substitutions: Semi-vowels.

7.5.1.3 Sound Substitutions: consonants

Learner should have pronounced	Listener heard	Frequency
/f/ sportif (four times)	/v/ sportive (four times)	4
/p/ peu Pierre	/d/ de D'hier	2
/p/ poire Pierre	/b/ boire bière	2
/b/ brune bac	/p/ prune parc	2
/R/ prune carré	/l/ plume Calais	2
/p/ port	/t/ tort	1
/p/ prie	/k/ cri	1
/f/ fouet	/ʒ/ jouet	1
/t/ tête	/d/ d'être	1
/n/ prune	/m/ plume	1
/l/ lèse	/n/ naisse	1
/l/ oncle	/R/ encre	1
/z/ oser	/s/ hausser	1

/ʒ/ mange	/ʃ/ manche	1
/k/ coûter	/g/ goûter	1
/m/ impossible	/l/ il possible	1

Table 7.3 Summary of sound substitutions: consonants.

7.5.1.4 Sound Insertions

Learner should have pronounced	Listener heard	Sound inserted
tête	d'être	/R/ (final position)
bas	bar	/R/ (final position)
fois	foire	/R/ (final position)
rond	rendre	/R/ (final position)
fois	froid	/R/ (after consonant, before vowel)
bac	parc	/R/ (after vowel, before consonant)
langue	angle	/l/ (final position)

Table 7.4 Sound insertions.

Two specific types of sound insertion involved the learner's pronunciation of mute "e" at the end of words and mute final consonants. Mute "e" was pronounced on four occasions as /e/:

Learner should have pronounced	Listener heard	Sound inserted
laisse	laisser	/e/
lèse	laisser	/e/
marche	marcher	/e/
signe	signer	/e/

Table 7.5 Insertions of /e/

Six mute final consonants were pronounced:

Learner should have pronounced	Listener heard	Sound inserted
tant	tante	/t/
dent	donc	/k/
blond	blonde	/d/
rond	rendre	/dR/
les	laisse	/s/
long	longue	/g/

Table 7.6 Insertions of mute final consonants.

7.5.1.5 Sound Deletions

Learner should have pronounced	Listener heard	Sound deleted
poire	poids	/R/ (final position)
blond	long	/b/ (initial position)
carré	craie	/a/ (medial position)
lève	le	/v/ (final position)
langue	angle	/l/ (initial position)
brun	rond	/b/ (initial position)

Table 7.7 Sound deletions.

7.5.1.5 Intonation

Learner should have pronounced	Listener heard	Description of error
tu te lèves tôt	tu te lèves tôt?	rise instead of fall
Ça va (three times)	Ça va? (three times)	rise instead of fall (three times)
Ça va? (twice)	Ça va (twice)	fall instead of rise (twice)
Tu aimes voyager?	Tu aimes voyager	fall instead of rise

Table 7.8 Intonation errors.

In summary, the learners incorrectly used rising intonation instead of falling in affirmative phrases four times and falling intonation instead of rising in interrogative phrases three times.

7.5.1.6 Liaison

In the case where the learner attempted to say *dessert* which was heard as *deux heures*,

it is not clear whether this can be described as a false liaison. Perhaps influenced by the mispronunciation of two vowel sounds, the listener "heard" a liaison which was not in fact intended.

7.5.1.7 Other Phonological Features

Although the first elicitation instrument contained a number of words and phrases which might be thought potential sources of intelligibility problems arising from the imposition of English stress patterns by the learners, there did not appear to be any misunderstandings attributable to these features.

7.5.1.8 Words and phrases unintelligible to the listener

In eighteen cases the listener was unable to understand the learner's pronunciation to the extent that she was unable to offer any plausible French word/phrase to describe what she heard.

Under these circumstances it is difficult to say what caused the lack of intelligibility. Six of the cases involved words which had been chosen to exemplify particular consonant sounds: *vendre, bière, oncle, long, hausser* and *huître*; *caméra* had been included as a possible example of where English word stress patterns might interfere with French pronunciation. Eight words had been chosen to exemplify vowel phonemes: *rue, vue, bras, bord, meurt, boeuf, mont* and *aucun*; and two semi-vowels: *fouet* and *payé*. Finally, *je veux travailler* had been included as an example of a phrase in which elision takes place. This was heard as *je veux être ---?*

It is interesting that for *mont, fouet* and *jouet* the listener recorded *m---?, f---?* and *j---?*. This suggests that the difficulty arose from mispronunciation of the phonemes /ɔ̃/, /w/ and /ɛ/. Also of interest is that of the other unintelligible words, four included nasal vowels (/ɑ̃/ twice, /ɔ̃/ and /œ̃/) and the phonemes /y/ and /œ/ both occurred twice.

7.5.1.9 Summary of data from the first activity

If we attempt to rank the various individual features according to their frequency of mispronunciation, we find that the most significant problems are as follows:

Frequency	Sound	Typical mispronunciations
35	All vowels	See below for breakdown
23	All consonants	See below
22	Oral vowels	See below
13	Nasal vowels	See below
7	Intonation	Rising for affirmation; falling for interrogation
6	Mute final consonant	/t/ and /d/, twice each
6	Insertion of /R/	Final position, four times
4	Mute final "e"	Pronounced as /e/

Table 7.9 Summary of data from first learner speaking activity.

Of the vowels, oral and nasal, the greatest problems arose with:

Frequency	Sound	Typical mispronunciation
7	/e/	pronounced as /ɛ/, six times
5	/ɔ̃/	pronounced as /ɑ̃/, all
5	/ɑ̃/	pronounced as /ɔ̃/, four times

Table 7.10 Summary of data on vowels.

For the consonants, the most common problems were:

Frequency	Sound	Typical mispronunciation
6	/p/	pronounced as /b/ or /d/, twice each
5	/f/	pronounced as /v/, four times

Table 7.11 Summary of data on consonants.

Further discussion of the data obtained through the first instrument follows in chapter eight.

7.5.2 The second instrument: picture description activity

Of the ten descriptions by the learners, the listener was able to correctly identify the picture being described on seven occasions. No incorrect identifications were made, but the listener said that in three cases she was unable to make any definite identification based on the learner's description. Thus we can say, at a very basic level, that there was a seventy per cent. success rate in communication, despite such segmental or suprasegmental errors as may have occurred.

Successful reconstruction of the learners' phrases, as contextualised by the pictures, was as follows:

Learner	Success rate	Percentage intelligibility of utterances
1	Ten out of ten phrases	100%
2	Seven out of ten	70%
3	Five out of eight	62%
4	Five out of eight	62%
5	Ten out of ten	100%
6	Six out of seven	86%
7	Seven out of seven	100%
8	Seven out of eight	87%
9	Eight out of eight	100%
10	Eight out of ten	80%

Table 7.12 Learner success rates in activity two.

Because only complete phrases were recorded by the listener, it is not possible to give precise causes for the instances of unintelligibility. However, given that the listener

was able to contextualise the learner's speech, it is possible that where nothing was recorded more than one error of pronunciation occurred. Alternatively, there may have been a particularly serious mispronunciation of a key word. If more than one mispronunciation took place, this may have either been multiple mispronunciation of individual sounds or a problem with the suprasegmental features of the learner's speech which rendered the whole utterance unintelligible.

Unfortunately, the data does not allow us to be more precise as to the source of the problem. Moreover, the design of the elicitation instrument could not provide data which could be analysed in terms of a causal link between discrete features of learner pronunciation and unintelligibility. Neither are we able to know whether the quantity of errors and seriousness of error in relation to comprehensibility are the same thing.

Whilst this activity showed that some learners were able to communicate meanings in an altogether satisfactory manner, despite any shortcomings in their pronunciation, for other learners difficulties with French phonology actually prevented communication from taking place.

Comparing the first two instruments, successful communication was more frequent in longer utterances than single words or phrases (84.7 per cent in the former against 76.7 per cent in the latter). This is not a huge difference, but the possible implications of this finding will be discussed in chapter eight (pages 180-181 below).

7.5.3 The third instrument: the "read-aloud" texts

Learner 1: *Comment entrer dans une grande école.*

COMMENT ENTRER DANS UNE 'GRANDE ECOLE'

1 Nous avons d'abord les études primaires et ensuite les études secondaires.
2 Le baccalauréat vient sanctionner nos études secondaires. Il faut avoir ce
3 certificat, le baccalauréat ... Pour les filles, n'importe quel baccalauréat
4 convient. Et ensuite, après le baccalauréat, nous avons une année obliga-
5 toire de préparation au concours d'entrée à cette école. Quand je suis
6 entrée, il y en avait six cents qui se présentaient, et on en prend cent
7 vingt, à peu près. Il y a cinq ou six écoles qui ont une classe spéciale de
8 préparation au concours pour cette école. Je crois qu'il y a deux lycées,
9 c'est-à-dire écoles publiques, et le reste sont des écoles privées. Alors à
10 ce moment-là il y a une autre sélection, c'est-à-dire que ... quand on
11 passe le baccalauréat, on a des mentions: 'bien'. 'très bien', 'passable', et
12 alors je pense que la sélection se fait de cette façon-là. Moi, j'ai préparé
13 le concours dans une école privée, mais dans les lycées publics, je pense
14 qu'on ne prend que les élèves qui ont eu la mention par exemple 'très
15 bien' ou 'bien' au baccalauréat.

Sample 7.1 Read-aloud text 1.

Listener comment.

"That was really quite easy to understand. It was completely comprehensible."

Second listenings.

Line 6: the second "en". Indistinct confirmed on second listening.
Line 11: "des mentions". Sounded like "dimensions". Adjusted on second listening.

Commentary.

This learner's pronunciation presents no obstacle to communication.

Learner 2: *L'éducation des sourds-muets.*

L'ÉDUCATION DES SOURDS-MUETS

1   Eh bien, voilà. J'ai pris des gosses, il y a quatre ans de ça. Ces petits sont
2   arrivés il y a donc quatre ans, et ils avaient à peu près six ans, sept ans.
3   Et on partait à zéro. L'âge est important. J'en avais de six ans, j'en avais
4   de cinq ans et demi, et j'en avais aussi de sept ans. Donc c'était tard. Le
5   premier travail, c'est la démutisation, enseigner les phonèmes, mais aussi
6   en même temps les syllabes, et autant que ça se peut, les mots, les petits
7   mots. Le problème se pose de la manière suivante. Vous avez un petit sourd
8   qui n'a jamais parlé. Vous lui faites au fond pas "a" ni "b", mais vous
9   prenez une balle, une pipe ... Une balle, une pipe, c'est très important
10 parce que ce sont quand même des phonèmes faciles à produire. Alors à
11 vous de réunir quelques objets. C'est pas tellement difficile. Et puis vous
12 commencez comme ça. Vous démarrez comme ça. Le problème est à la
13 fois unique et multiple, parce qu'on fait en même temps un travail de
14 synthèse et d'analyse. Vous voyez? En effet vous lui montrez une balle
15 et vous dites "balle". Et souvent je me suis posé le problème, et je me
16 suis dit: "Pourtant ça ... C'est très difficile de comprendre que pour ça
17 on dit 'balle' et que pour ça on dit 'pipe' ". Bien non, il (n') y a pas de
18 problème. Et au fond je comprends pourquoi il (n') y a pas de problème.
19 C'est bien un être humain qu'on a en face de nous. Le langage, c'est quand
20 même quelque chose de proprement humain. Vous voyez où ça touche?
21 Il est appris. Il ne demande qu'à apprendre, je crois, l'être humain. C'est
22 très important ce que je dis là, et j'y ai réfléchi assez longtemps ...
23 Parce que moi-même, je m'étonne ... Il m'arrive actuellement de donner
24 des formes d'expression à mes élèves. Par exemple: 'Je prends le train'.
25 C'est pas ça du tout! C'est: 'Je monte dans le train'. Bon! Eh bien mes
26 élèves, je leur dis que c'est comme ça, on dit: 'Je prends le train'. Ils ne
27 discutent pas tellement, ils ne cherchent même pas tellement à comprendre,
28 à décomposer, ils acceptent! Vous voyez, il y a une attitude d'acceptation
29 qui n'est pas forcément passive. Il y a une attitude d'acceptation du lan-
30 gage, enfin du symbolisme ... C'est un grand mot, mais enfin c'est tout
31 de même un peu ça ...

Sample 7.2 Read-aloud text 2.

Listener comment.

"That was very hard work. It's difficult to get the meaning because it's not always clear which words go together to make phrases. Sometimes it sounds like a long list of individual words."

Second listenings

Line 4:	"c'était tard". Indistinct. Confirmed.
Lines 6-7:	"autant...les petits mots". Indistinct. Confirmed..
Line 9:	"une balle, une pipe". Indistinct. Confirmed.

Line 13: "unique" and "multiple". Indistinct. Confirmed.

Line 16: "portant". Indistinct. Confirmed.

Line 17: "On dit 'balle'...on dit 'pipe'". Sounded like "on a des balles...on a des pipes". Adjusted on second listening.

Line 19: "C'est bien un être humain". Sounded like "C'est bien on a une main". Unable to clarify.

Line 20: "Vous voyez où ça touche?". No rising intonation. Hence interrogative sense not understood.

Line 21: "Il est appris." Sounded like "et après". Unable to clarify.

Lines 19-21: This whole section was considered incomprehensible.

Line 22: "j'y ai réflechi assez longtemps". Sounded like "j'y agrafe les fiers c'est le mouton." Unable to adjust, rendering the whole phrase unintelligible.

Line 28: "décomposer". Indistinct. Confirmed.

Commentary

There seem to be two possible causes for the loss of comprehensibility. It may be that the problem stems from the cumulative effect of successive segmental errors. Alternatively, the problem may arise from the lack of division of the text into sense groups, i.e. a suprasegmental problem of rhythm. This latter explanation is supported by the listener's comment.

Learner 3: *Paris devient un garage*

PARIS DEVIENT UN GARAGE

1 D'ailleurs je crois que ces grandes villes ne poussent pas justement à ...
2 Parce qu'on ne tient pas tellement à y rester. Ah bien moi, je ficherai
3 le camp aussitôt que je le pourrai ! Et puis on en a par-dessus la tête de
4 Paris! Paris devient de plus en plus désagréable! Moi, j'aimais bien Paris
5 quand j'étais jeune. C'était une ville agréable! Mais il n'y avait pas de
6 voitures déjà ... Il y avait des voitures qui circulaient, mais il n'y en
7 avait pas dans les rues. C'était pas un garage, Paris! Vous me direz: "C'est
8 pas spécial à Paris, c'est partout maintenant". Mais toutes les grandes villes,
9 prenez Lyon, Marseille, c'est pareil! Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire? Où
10 .aller? C'est pas la peine d'aller dans une grande ville. Mais moi, ce que je
11 me demande, c'est où ça va aller, parce que, bon, vous, vous avez connu
12 Paris il y a combien, trois, quatre ans? Six ans? Bon, il y a six ans,
13 vous pensez, il y a une certaine différence! Alors si vous reveniez encore
14 dans cinq ans, moi je suis sûr que ça va devenir catastrophique! On ne
15 pourra plus circuler du tout. Ou alors si, on va faire comme dans cer-
16 taines villes, où on n'aura pas le droit de circuler.
17   Oui, mais vous savez comment ça se transforme, ces garages, puisqu'il
18 y en a eu pas mal de faits, quand même. Alors ce sont des parkings
19 payants. Alors vous en avez un ... Moi, par exemple, quand je vais à
20 l'Hôtel de Ville, il y a un parking à côté, alors là automatiquement j'y
21 vais. C'est un franc de la demie heure. Eh bien, qu'est-ce que vous voulez,
22 vous restez deux heures à l'Hôtel de Ville, ça vous fait quatre francs. Mais
23 vous (n')allez pas y rester tous les jours toute la journée!

Sample 7.3 Read-aloud text 3.

Listener comment

"That was quite hard to understand. He speaks very slowly which makes it difficult sometimes to get the meaning. I had to concentrate hard, but I could follow it."

Second listenings

Line 9:   "prenez". Sounded like "Paris". This would have made sense in the context of the list of large towns which followed.

Lines 15-16:   "on va faire...certaines villes"- "comme dans" indistinct. Confirmed.

Lines 17-18:   "il...faits". Indistinct. Confirmed.

Line 21:   "C'est un franc de la demie-heure" – "franc" indistinct. Confirmed.

Commentary

The listener's comment is interesting. Slowness in speech is often thought to aid clarity of articulation and hence intelligibility. However, in this case, it appears that the disruption of natural speech rhythms caused by very slow delivery acts as an obstacle to easy comprehensibility.

Learner 4: *L'Ile Saint-Louis*

```
                        L'ÎLE SAINT-LOUIS

1    Je crois que Paris perd certainement un peu de ses qualités de charme à
2    cause de la circulation , à cause des voitures. Je prends cette île, Saint-
3    Louis, que j'ai connue, un quartier absolument adorable, provincial et
4    calme et tout, maintenant est un vrai parc-voitures le soir. Quand je suis
5    venue habiter dans l'île Saint-Louis, il y a de ça plus de trente-cinq ans,
6    à ce moment-là, il y avait un restaurant dans le bout de l'île, là-bas où il
7    y a une brasserie maintenant, et puis c'est tout! Enfin il y avait des cafés,
8    il y avait des bistrots, mais il n'y avait pas de restaurants. Il y avait énor-
9    mément de commerces, les épiciers, les marchands de fruits ou primeurs,
10   tout cela il y en avait, enfin probablement trop. Et maintenant, ils se sont
11   remplacés par des restaurants et des antiquaires. Il n'y avait pas un seul
12   antiquaire! Il n'y avait pas, dans toute l'île, un seul antiquaire! Et puis
13   ça s'est mis à changer après la guerre, mais surtout depuis quelques années,
14   depuis cinq ou six ans ... Tous les petits commerçants ont été chassés
15   pour les restaurants, et ... Mais alors ça devient tout à fait touristique,
16   et le soir, on ne peut plus du tout circuler dans les rues: il y a des voitures
17   sur les trottoirs. Ni les piétons ni les voitures ne peuvent plus circuler!
18   Encore, c'est pire à l'heure du dîner. Donc, on (ne) peut plus flâner le soir
19   dans l'île Saint-Louis, on ne sait pas où y mettre les pieds! Il y avait, il y
20   a quelques années, maintenant j'en vois plus, je ne sais pas ce qu'ils sont
21   devenus ... Il y avait des clochards, des clochards qui vivaient sur les
22   berges de l'île Saint-Louis. Il y avait quelques groupes de clochards ...
```

Sample 7.4 Read-aloud text 4.

Listener comment

"Fairly easy. She mispronounces some words – 'provincial', 'antiquaire', 'clochards'. But because the rest is clear I was able to understand what she was saying without stopping the tape very often."

Second listenings

Line 4:   "parc-voitures", word final /k/ not pronounced. Confirmed.

Line 10:   "trop" indistinct. Unable to clarify.

Line 20:   "vois" indistinct. Unable to clarify.

Line 21:   "clochards" indistinct. Meaning became clear when second occurrence
of the word provided a context for understanding.

Commentary

Two mispronunciations involved nasal vowels – 'provincial' /pRɔvẽsjal/ pronounced
/pRɔvɑ̃sjal/ and 'antiquaire' /ɑ̃tikɛR/ pronounced /ẽtikɛR/. Both the questionnaires
and interviews and contrastive analysis suggest that these are potentially serious
problem areas for comprehensibility. However, the listener did not feel that
intelligibility was compromised in either case.

Learner 5: *Habite-on Paris volontairement ou par nécessité?*

HABITE-T-ON PARIS VOLONTAIREMENT OU PAR NÉCESSITÉ?

1   Je ne peux parler que de moi. J'ai moi-même un appartement à Chantilly.
2   Attention, mon domicile actuel est Paris. Et j'ai acheté un appartement à
3   Chantilly pour des raisons personnelles. C'est le Chantilly où il y a le
4   célèbre château et où il y a aussi mes amis les chevaux de course. Je
5   vivrais à Chantilly bien avec beaucoup plus de plaisir qu'à Paris, mais c'est
6   une nécessité de père de famille de vivre à Paris parce que mon fils est à
7   l'université et que je ne veux pas lui faire faire deux cents kilomètres par
8   jour. Moi-même, j'aurai cinquante-trois ans bientôt, je ne veux pas faire
9   cent soixante kilomètres par jour, en tout cas jamais en voiture, et comme
10 malheureusement le train de Chantilly arrive à la Gare du Nord ... Le
11 train Chantilly - Paris, c'est rien! Le drame, c'est Gare du Nord, Porte
12 d'Orléans! Donc, tant que les transports ne sont pas organisés de façon ...
13 ... les transports et l'accès des villes ne sont pas organisés de telle façon
14 que je pourrais faire mes quatre-vingts kilomètres en trois quarts d'heure,
15 je vis à Paris. C'est effectivement ... Vous pouvez appeler ça une néces-
16 sité professionnelle, je dirais que c'est une nécessité matérielle. Je ne le
17 fais pas avec plaisir! Et pour répondre à la deuxième partie de votre
18 question, le jour où je serai en retraite, je n'habiterai sûrement pas Paris!
19 Cela dit, j'ai un revenu qui appartient à, si vous voulez, une classe privi-
20 légiée. Disons que je fais partie des dix pour cent du haut. Bon! Ce qui
21 ne veut pas dire que je fais partie des un pour cent de l'avenue Foch.
22 Bon! Je gagne bien ma vie pour un Français. Pour vous donner un ordre
23 d'idées, j'approche à peu près en brut (avant les impôts et avant les re-
24 tenues), l'ancien million de francs par mois, tout compris (ce que je gagne
25 ici, mes cours dans les grandes écoles, je suis expert auprès du gouverne-
26 ment, je suis administrateur de société), tout compris. J'appartiens déjà
27 à une tranche très haute de la hiérarchie fiscale. Alors cela dit, je pense
28 que je n'habiterai en aucun cas Paris, mais si mes moyens me le permet-
29 tent encore, j'aurai un petit pied-à-terre à Paris. J'aurai une ou deux
30 pièces où je pourrai venir passer trois jours tous les mois, ou huit jours
31 tous les trois mois.

Sample 7.5 Read-aloud text 5.

Listener comment

"Her accent is very English It's the most English so far. But overall it's fairly easy to understand when you can get used to her accent. What is curious is that when I can't understand her, it doesn't sound like French words at all...That's why I haven't written anything for the sections I couldn't understand."

Second listenings

Line 8:   "cinquante-trois ans". Unable to clarify.

Line 9:   "en tout cas jamais en voiture". Unable to clarify.

Line 20:   "haut". Unable to clarify.

Line 21:   "Un pour cent de l'Avenue Foch". Unable to clarify.

Commentary

The features of pronunciation which the listener identified as characteristically "English" were primarily vowel sounds in which the "pure" French vowels were articulated as diphthongs: 'château' /ʃɑto/, pronounced /ʃɑtəʊ/; 'moi-même' /mɛm/, pronounced /meɪm/; 'train' /tRɛ̃/, pronounced /tReɪn/; 'votre' /vɔtR/, pronounced /vəʊtr/; 'autre' /otR/, pronounced /əʊtr/; 'société' /sɔsjete/, pronounced /səʊsjeteɪ/. There is also evidence of the transfer of English phonemes in 'impôts' /ɛ̃po/, pronounced /ɪmpo/. Further transfer from the learner's first language can be seen in the aspiration of the letter "h" in the word 'haut'. What is interesting is that with the exception of the aspirated "h", none of these errors seems to have caused a loss of intelligibility.

Learner 6: *Un étudiant sur ses homologues américains*

UN ETUDIANT SUR SES HOMOLOGUES AMERICAINS

1 Oui, mon frère me l'a dit, et des Américains me l'ont dit aussi. Je vais
2 vous dire tout à fait franchement ses réactions. Il est revenu, là, au bout
3 d'un an. Il a passé donc l'année dernière à Stanford, et il est revenu en
4 disant que c'est extraordinaire, c'était vraiment une vie extraordinaire,
5 parce que lui disait: "Les Américains ne savent pas travailler. Donc les
6 Américains qui font de l'engineering comme moi, ils passent un temps
7 fou, ils bûchent, ils travaillent énormément pendant toute l'année. Moi,
8 comme j'ai fait les Mines (il avait fait l'École des Mines), j'ai déjà l'habi-
9 tude du travail, je sais ce qu'il faut apprendre quand on me donne quel-
10 que chose à faire, donc je travaille beaucoup moins qu'eux. Et tous les
11 Français comme ça, on est trois Français ..." Il a fait un Master's l'an
12 dernier en un an, en engineering à Stanford. Il disait que les étudiants
13 qui étaient avec lui ne savaient pas ... Si vous voulez, ils passaient beau-
14 coup plus de temps à travailler que lui. Alors, si vous voulez, à ce mo-
15 ment on pourrait dire que lui, il a peut-être pas de bons résultats, mais
16 il est le ... C'est lui qui a le plus de 'credits' de toute l'université, même
17 les Américains y compris. Il trouve, si vous voulez, alors au point de vue
18 mentalité des Américains, ils sont très drôles, très décontractés, qu'ils
19 manquent un peu de sens de l'humour, ou en tout cas qu'ils ont un sens
20 d'humour différent du sens d'humour français, mais sans ça, qu'ils sont
21 très dévoués, très hospitaliers ... Oui, oui, il a été invité dans beaucoup
22 de familles ...
23 Moi, je ferai surtout, c'est pas exactement un stage, enfin je voudrais
24 continuer mes études aux États-Unis et surtout me ... si vous voulez, me
25 spécialiser dans la publicité et le marketing. Mais, si vous voulez, j'ai quand
26 même des notions assez sommaires sur ce sujet, j'en ai pas fait à l'école ...
27 Alors, si vous voulez, je crois que le ... enfin que la publicité est un des
28 aspects du marketing, je crois, puisque le marketing c'est finalement ...
29 c'est prendre un produit ou un service et faire toutes les opérations, aussi
30 bien promotionnelles, aussi bien, si vous voulez, trouver les endroits où on
31 va vendre ce produit, trouver la campagne publicitaire qu'on va faire pour
32 ce produit ... Donc, si vous voulez, le marketing enveloppe tout. C'est
33 aussi bien l'étude des clientèles qu'on veut toucher, enfin tout le travail
34 avant-coureur d'une campagne de publicité, tout le travail avant-coureur
35 pour savoir comment sera le produit, enfin, quel sera son conditionnement,
36 ça, je crois que le marketing enveloppe tout. Le marketing est un peu plus
37 scientifique que la publicité: la publicité est un des aspects du marketing ...

Sample 7.6 Read-aloud text 6.

Listener comment

"I had to stop the tape more than for any other student so far. I think a French person would have got tired of the conversation and stopped listening."

Second listenings

Line 7:   "bûchent" /byʃ/ pronounced like "bougent" /buʒ/. Adjusted.

Line 8:   First "Mines", pronounced as the English word "mines (/maɪns/).

                 Adjusted after the learner pronounced the same word correctly later in

                 the same sentence.

Line 11:   "trois" /tRwɑ/ pronounced as /twɑ/. Unable to confirm.

Line 21:   "très devoués", sounded like "des duvets". Unable to confirm.

Line 24:   "surtout me…". Incomprehensible.

Line 29:   "faire toute les opérations". Confirmed.

Line 34:   "tout le travail avant-coureur". Confirmed.

Commentary

Comprehensibility was lost in lines 7, 8, 11, 21 and 24. In line 7 two phonemic errors occurred (substitution of /u/ for /y/ and /ʒ/ for /ʃ/). It is impossible to say whether the word would have been intelligible if there had been only one mistake, whether one of the mispronunciations was more significant than the other in relation to comprehensibility or whether the cumulative effect of two mispronounced phonemes in one word was important. Line 8 is an example of a cognate word causing mispronunciation, although it is interesting that the word was correctly pronounced immediately afterwards. The failure to articulate /R/ correctly in line 11 reflects the contributions of some participants in the survey and interviews as well as contrastive analyses of the French and English phonological systems. The breakdowns in lines 21 and 24 are less easy to explain. Given the listener's comment above, it may be that she had succumbed to the overload on her powers of concentration that she predicted might occur in a "real life" situation.

Learner 7: *La vie d'un artiste*

<div style="border">

LA VIE D'UN ARTISTE

1 Je le coule moi-même. Je fais une maquette en cire. Je prends le procédé
2 antique. La cire, on la ramollit. Avec les mêmes outils que pour la sculp-
3 ture, on la travaille. Alors, quand le sujet est fait, je l'enrobe de plâtre
4 que je mélange avec de la terre à four, je mets des épingles aux coudes,
5 aux extrémités pour faire des trous d'air, je garde un trou de coulée, et
6 puis je mets mon métal en fusion, et puis je le coule dedans. Et alors
7 auparavant je fais fondre la cire dans la cuisinière électrique. Voilà mon
8 creuset ... Alors je fais chauffer ça avec deux lampes à braser pour le
9 faire fondre. Mais les fondeurs d'art, les jeunes ne veulent pas le faire!
10 Cette statue, je l'ai faite en plâtre directement, parce qu'on (ne) trouve
11 plus de mouleurs. Couler en bronze? J'en ai pour deux millions d'anciens
12 francs! Mais c'est la même chose! Tenez, celle-là, la ville de Paris me
13 l'achète. Mais alors, ils me la paient en trois fois. Ils me donnent cinq cent
14 mille francs en dépot ... Mais moi, j'ai huit cent mille francs de moulage
15 de bronze!
16   Je fais de la peinture maintenant, parce que ça, je m'en fiche! Et puis
17 ça m'amuse, ça me détend, vous savez! Je vais vous montrer ... Oui, c'est
18 primitif. Primitif à cause du décor. Grammaticalement parlant, oui, d'accord,
19 un primitif c'est quelqu'un qui n'a pas eu d'entraînement, mais on a donné
20 le nom de primitif à ceux qui veulent un retour aux sources, par exemple
21 les peintres qui ne mélangent pas leurs couleurs, vous savez? Ils mettent
22 des couleurs brutes ... On les a baptisés primitifs. Moi, j'ai fait des mé-
23 langes, je me suis amusé comme un petit fou ... Je vais vous montrer mes
24 tableaux. Ça, voyez-vous, c'est un peu pompier, mais il y a un symbole là:
25 l'arbre vivant qui vient au secours de l'arbre mort ... Je me cherche d'ail-
26 leurs, remarquez ... Ça, les tableaux que je fais, c'est pour les vendre ...
27 Pas chers, parce que ça je les vendrai. Je m'en fiche éperdument, tandis
28 qu'une sculpture, la vendre bon marché, je ne peux pas! Ça me fend le
29 cœur!

</div>

Sample 7.7 Read-aloud text 7.

Listener comment

"The first section was quite hard to understand. I had to stop the cassette a lot of times and replay it to be sure I had understood. The second half was much easier. I don't know why."

Second listenings

Line 1:   "Je prends". Unsure whether this was "Je prends" /ʒə pRɑ̃/ or

          "J'apprends" /ʒapRɑ̃/. Unable to confirm.

Lines 3-5:   "Je l'enrobe…un trou de coulée". Unsure on first listening. Confirmed

          on second.

Lines 7-10:   "Voilà mon creuset...plus de mouleurs". Unsure on first listening. Confirmed on second.

Commentary

Line 1 presents an interesting case of a mispronunciation which would be quite plausible in the context of the passage. The lack of clarity in the articulation of /ʒə/, where the listener though she might have heard /ʒa/, could have lead to misunderstanding in a conversation. Does the speaker *use* the traditional method or is he *learning* it? The difference in difficulty of comprehension of the two paragraphs may be the result of the technical vocabulary used in the first paragraph. The lexis is probably unfamiliar to both the speaker and listener. The second paragraph uses much more general, everyday lexis and the listener found this easy to understand.

Learner 8: *Une étudiante se documente pour son mémoire*

UNE ÉTUDIANTE SE DOCUMENTE POUR SON MÉMOIRE

1 Enfin il faut avoir quand même quelques années d'expérience derrière soi
2 parce que, quand on sort de l'école, on se rend très bien compte-qu'on ne
3 sait rien du tout. Moi, j'ai fait un stage pendant les vacances. Eh bien, ce
4 que je savais ou rien, c'était pareil! J'avais demandé à être dans une maison
5 de prêt-à-porter. Seulement, le prêt-à-porter n'est pas du tout une profession
6 très structurée avec de grandes entreprises, ça c'est spécial à la France. Par
7 conséquent, c'était une petite entreprise qui était dirigée par toute une
8 famille qui n'avait absolument pas besoin de moi dans ses services. Ce qui
9 fait que je n'ai pas appris grand-chose. Au point de vue entreprise, non,
10 au point de vue prêt-à-porter, un petit peu quand même ... J'ai vu com-
11 ment on fabriquait les vêtements, comment était faite une collection.
12   Mais beaucoup de Françaises s'habillent encore chez la couturière. De
13 moins en moins quand même, environ trente pour cent. Je dirais que trente
14 pour cent des vêtements sont faits par des couturières, ou faits par la
15 maîtresse de maison elle-même, ou ... Mais moi, j'ai des tas d'amies qui
16 se font des robes, et j'aimerais beaucoup pouvoir me les faire, parce que
17 d'abord je suis très grande, et je ne trouve jamais dans le commerce ce
18 qu'il me faut à ma taille. Et puis, parce que ça revient beaucoup moins
19 cher de les faire soi-même. Mais ici, on n'a absolument pas le temps, on
20 n'a jamais le temps de lire un livre, c'est effrayant! Ce n'est pas que je ne
21 sache pas coudre, mais er   j'ai jamais eu le temps de coudre.
22   Je ne sais pas ... Il a fallu que je trouve un sujet pour ce mémoire,
23 et c'est toujours difficile de trouver un sujet. Alors, j'ai des amies qui
24 m'ont dit ... enfin j'ai vu plusieurs personnes pour avoir des idées de
25 sujets, et finalement j'ai vu une styliste, et je me suis dit qu'au fond ça
26 pouvait être amusant de faire quelque chose d'un peu féminin, parce qu'au
27 fond il y a ... Quand je vois des amies qui font des ... un mémoire sur
28 les roulements-à-billes ou sur les feuilles hydrauliques, vraiment, ça!

Sample 7.8 Read-aloud text 8.

Listener comment

"This was the easiest of them all. It's obviously not a French person speaking, but I can understand almost everything she says. I didn't stop the cassette because although there are some words that she mispronounces, I can still understand them because the rest is good."

Commentary

The listener's comment highlights the importance of *comfortable* comprehensibility. Because the phonological quality of the whole of the utterance is good, the occasional mispronunciation does not prevent intelligibility.

Conclusion

In this chapter (and chapter six) I have focussed on a *presentation* of the research findings obtained through teacher and learner questionnaires and interviews and an investigation of learner pronunciation. In the next chapter I will consider some of the issues arising from the data presented above.

Chapter Eight

Issues Arising from the Research Findings

8.1 Introduction

In the first part of this chapter I will compare the research findings from the teacher and learner questionnaires and interviews and consider them in relation to the existing literature in the area and published teaching and learning materials. Is there agreement, disagreement, or both, between the various parties, i.e., teachers, learners, materials publishers and applied linguists? This is at the heart of the first five questions on which the current research is based, that is to say, to what extent there exist commonly held views concerning the phonological challenges facing adult anglophone learners of French. In short, *are we barking up the same* tree? I will also look at the possible significance of this aspect of the data in relation to existing classroom practice.

In the second part of the chapter, my focus shifts to the samples of learner pronunciation and the sixth research question. Does the data which has been obtained confirm or refute, in whole or in part, the views of the various parties? To continue the analogy, *are we barking up the right tree*? I will look at how issues arising from the data may throw light on what needs to happen in the classroom for the teaching of French phonology to adult anglophone learners to be more successful. This is the desired pedagogical outcome to which the research is directed.

8.2 Are we all barking up the same tree?

In general there was a high degree of consistency between the views expressed by the teacher respondents to the questionnaire and those expressed by the smaller group of teachers who participated in the interviews. Likewise, the remarks of the learner interviewees strongly resembled the learner questionnaire responses. In other words, the different formats used for eliciting teachers' and learners' views on areas of phonological difficulty and/or unintelligibility did not seem to alter the content of the responses. The smaller interviewee groups, who were questioned in more detail and in an interactive situation with the interviewer, agreed in all essential points with the much larger group of questionnaire respondents.

Two slight differences can be noted between the questionnaire and interview responses. First, the interviews drew out slightly more (particularly from the teachers) than did the questionnaires concerning suprasegmental features of learner pronunciation and the influence of these features on intelligibility. This may be because the interactive nature of the interview and the presence of the interviewer helped the interviewees to express themselves on an area, which, as has already been noted, can be difficult to describe accurately and may therefore receive less attention than the more easily described segmental features.

Secondly, learner problems with the phoneme /j/ (in words such as *fille*, /fij/) were much more prominent in the teacher interviews than they had been in the teachers' questionnaire responses. It is difficult to see why this should have been the case.

8.2.1 Measures of agreement

Comparing teacher and learner responses in the surveys, the most striking feature is the high level of agreement on the features of French phonology causing most difficulty. The two groups have an almost identical ranking of areas of difficulty. Both teacher and learner questionnaire respondents focused on individual sounds (*all* teachers and the great majority of learners) and on nasal vowels as the individual phonemes causing particular problems (fifteen out of sixteen teachers and fourteen of the thirty one learners who gave examples). The phonemes /R/ (*rouge*) and /y/ (*tu*) and distinguishing between /e/ (*marché*) and /ɛ/ (*chèvre*) were mentioned by both teachers and learners but on a much smaller scale.

However, whilst in the questionnaire several learners identified the semi-vowels /j/ and /ɥ/ in conjunction with /œ/ as a major problem (*œil*, /œj/, being a "pure" case in point) , this was only mentioned by a single teacher. Curiously, as mentioned above, this featured much more prominently in the teacher interviews.

Both groups agreed in not only identifying segmentals as the area of greatest difficulty but also in making far fewer comments on suprasegmental features. This tends to reinforce the views of Taylor (1993: 1) and Dalton and Seidelhofer (1994: 72-3), cited

in previous chapters, that one of the problems of teaching and learning suprasegmental features of phonology is the difficulty of describing these areas in a clear way. If awareness of the features themselves is underdeveloped (as it seemed to be in both sets of interviews), then their teaching and learning is likely to lag behind those areas which can be easily identified and described.

It is worth asking whether the high degree of teacher-learner agreement can be ascribed to teacher influence on learners. If the teacher has said enough times that a certain feature is particularly difficult, then might not learners "believe the experts" and repeat the opinion as their own?

Perhaps the issue of *why* teachers and learners seem to agree so much is not important, what is significant is that they *do* agree. Teachers and learners alike were generally optimistic about the intelligibility of learners' pronunciation. Furthermore, both groups agreed that phonological intelligibility was not a "fixed" quality but tended to vary according to factors such as the familiarity of the lexis being used, the length of utterance and the time available to the learner for "rehearsal".

8.2.2 Approaches to teaching and learning

On the other hand, there was much less unanimity concerning approaches to teaching and learning pronunciation. Here the dividing line was not between teachers and learners but within each group. Some teachers and learners favoured an explicit teaching of the articulation of sounds through explanations of what the speech organs do for each phoneme, whilst other teachers and learners preferred an approach based on acquisition through exposure and organised repetition and/or natural imitation. Some teachers and learners felt that auditory discrimination of certain phonemes (or phoneme "pairs" such as /e/ and /ɛ/) presented a problem, whilst other teachers and learners felt that the problem lay not at the level of auditory perception but of accurate articulation. Thus two teachers might agree that learners confused the words *les* (/le /) and *lait* (/lɛ/) but not necessarily agree on the causes of the learners' difficulty.

8.2.3 Course Materials

In the following paragraphs I will consider whether teacher and learner concerns are reflected (or perhaps influenced?) by the course materials in current use in many adult French courses.

The course materials examined in chapter 4 approach the teaching and learning of phonology from a wide range of perspectives. Insofar as any generalisations can be made, it appears to be the case that the courses produced by British publishers approach the teaching of French phonology from the standpoint of certain assumptions about the features which are likely to pose problems for anglophone learners. Whether this is based on a contrastive analysis (or any other branch of applied linguistic analysis) or practical classroom experience it is impossible to say. Nevertheless, many of these assumptions seem to correspond to points made in the teacher and learner surveys.

The British produced materials, with partial exceptions, such as *The French Experience*, are dominated by their consideration of individual sounds. Whilst this reflects the "ranking" of difficulties in both groups' surveys, it may also suggest that teacher and learner preoccupations are influenced by the materials with which they work. Insufficient data exists at present to determine whether there is a causal link and in which direction it may operate.

The courses emanating from French publishers adopt a broader approach to teaching pronunciation. Again, no data exists, but it would be interesting to consider whether groups of anglophone learners using these course materials would offer the same opinions on French phonology as those in the survey using British produced texts. The French published texts, with a very small number of exceptions, also tend to give prominence to individual phonemes over suprasegmental features.

The texts in current use by the surveyed groups may well have influenced the teacher responses on planned pronunciation teaching. The majority of them do not pay much attention to suprasegmental features, which may help to explain why these tend to figure less prominently in planned teaching, given some teachers' reluctance to deviate too far from the prescribed course book. If this was the case, then the absence of

suprasegmentals from the classroom might explain their low position in the awareness of learners. What the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve!

Many interviewees drew a link between learner pronunciation problems and a perceived difficulty in relating French phonology to the orthography of the written language. This was identified as being a consequence of differences between the conventions of French and English and perceived "inconsistencies" in how French sounds are represented in written language. Thorough explanations of the relations between these two systems are few and far between in the course materials which were examined.

The *full* range of materials available does provide opportunities for teaching all of the features of French phonology, should teachers decide to do so. However, this cannot be said of any individual course book in the survey. One possible reason for teachers not teaching across a wider range of phonological features may be lack of awareness of the materials and/or lack of time for preparing additional activities to supplement the course book being used, rather than a considered view that the features not being taught are unimportant.

Finally, it is interesting to note that a number of the advanced courses, both British and French (e.g. *Nouvelles Perspectives* and *Le Nouvel Espaces*), have no explicit pronunciation work at all. The assumption seems to be that this is unnecessary at this level, although my own experience suggests that this is far from being the case. Any teacher using these courses would certainly have to devote a large amount of time to devising a full phonological learning programme for his/her classes (assuming, of course, that he/she felt that pronunciation work was necessary at this level).

8.2.4 Causes of difficulty

The surveys revealed a high level of agreement between the various parties on the analysis of those features of French pronunciation likely to cause difficulties. The basic premise of contrastive analysis, that "degree of difference equals degree of difficulty", was reflected in many of the views of teachers and learners. The implication is that the greater the difference between features of the learners first-language and the target language, the greater should be the priority given to these

elements in teaching and learning programmes. Thus phonemes which exist in the target language but not in the learners' first language, such as French /y/ or /R/, should be at the forefront of work on pronunciation by English speakers. This did, in fact, appear to be the case in many of the course materials examined and in the classroom practice of the teachers surveyed.

There was a high level of agreement that individual phonemes were the greatest source of difficulty to learners. To this degree, there was support for the more "traditional" contrastive analyses, rather than more recent writing, which stresses the importance of suprasegmental aspects of phonological systems. Consequently, it was quite logical that individual sounds were the most prominent feature in the planned pronunciation teaching of the teachers in the survey.

Teachers and learners were almost identical in their views on the ranking of the different phonological categories according to degree of difficulty. By and large, these priorities were also to be found in the course materials.

Both teachers and learners recognised that stress within rhythm groups, specifically the "regular" timing of French compared to English, posed serious difficulties. However, neither group had very much to say about the precise nature of the problem and the teachers and the course materials were doing little systematic work to teach this feature. Only four of the eight teacher interviewees claimed to have done any teaching of this feature in the last twelve months.

Moreover, two teachers appeared not to be doing any planned pronunciation teaching at all. Possibly these were teachers using some of the course materials which gave little prominence to phonology. Or perhaps they were using the courses (usually of a more "advanced" nature) which had no material at all on pronunciation. Alternatively, these teachers may have felt that phonology was not a particularly important issue for their current students.

Although learner views on the amount of pronunciation work being done in their classes were not fully consistent, there were those who said that they wanted to do

more. The surveys did not provide any information to connect these teachers, learners and materials (as all responses were anonymous), but it seems a possibility that such a link may have existed.

8.2.4.1 Segmental Features

As mentioned above, contrastive analysis suggests that the greatest threats to intelligible pronunciation of French by English-speaking learners will come from those features of the two languages where there is the greatest difference and in particular those sounds in the target language which do not exist in the learner's first language.

Specific contrastive analyses of French and English give great importance to the French vowel phonemes /y/ and /u/ and to the four nasal vowels of French, /ɛ̃/,/ã/, /ɔ̃/ and /œ̃/. Emphasis is also given to French /R/, which is quite unlike any English phoneme.

The teachers tended to reflect this view, seeing nasal vowels as the most serious source of difficulty. Likewise, the course materials concentrated on the same individual sounds: the nasal vowels, /y/ on its own and in opposition to /u/, /e/ on its own and in opposition to /ɛ/, and /R/.

The learners recognised nasal vowels (both in their production in contrast to oral vowels and in the differences between themselves) as an area of great difficulty. Less emphasis was given to /y/, /e/ and /R/. The learners did, however, comment at some length on their problems with the semi-vowels /j/ and /ɥ/, particularly in combination with the vowels /œ/ and /ø/. This does not feature strongly in the contrastive analysis literature and (with one exception) was not prominent in the course materials.

8.2.4.2 Suprasegmental Features

As mentioned above, the literature and participants in the survey had far less to say about the issue of suprasegmental features of French phonology (such as intonation, stress and rhythm) and the challenges they pose to anglophone learners. Although both teachers and learners recognised the problems caused by incorrect stress within

phrases, neither felt able to say very much by way of description of the problem, and the issue did not figure very much in the teachers' planned pronunciation teaching.

It may be the case that difficulty in the description of a phonological feature results in that feature being underrepresented in teaching and learning programmes (out of sight, out of mind?). This view is reinforced by the fact that, with the exception of one course (*Café Crème*), suprasegmentals receive proportionally much less attention than individual phonemes in teaching/learning materials.

The suprasegmental feature which received most attention in course materials, and was mentioned regularly by teachers and learners, is intonation. Contrastive analysis proposes that English-speaking learners are likely to encounter problems with the rising intonation of certain French interrogative forms, particularly where a question is signalled by intonation alone, word order remaining unchanged from an affirmative phrase (*tu l'as vu* = "you have seen him"; *tu l'as vu?* = "have you seen him?").

8.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that, in very many cases, teachers, learners and the authors of course books are "barking up the same tree". That is to say that there appear to be a large number of shared opinions on what features of French phonology will cause particular difficulty for anglophone learners and will be liable to render their speech unintelligible.

However, the evidence presented so far poses as many questions as it answers. Does an analysis of actual learner pronunciation confirm or contradict this body of commonly held opinions? Is difficulty the same as unintelligibility? What are the implications for teaching and learning? The various parties might be barking up the *same* tree but are they barking up the *right* tree?

These are the questions which will be addressed in the second part of this chapter, starting with an examination and discussion of the examples of learner pronunciation elicited by the research.

8.4 Are we barking up the right tree?

8.4.1 The first elicitation instrument: words in isolation

The samples of learner pronunciation elicited here supported a number of the views described above, whilst suggesting one other major phonemic source of unintelligibility which was barely mentioned in the questionnaires and interviews.

Overall, sound substitutions were responsible for the highest number of breakdowns in intelligibility, with nasal vowels and /e/ posing particular problems for the participants. /y/ and /R/ did not cause as many difficulties as their prominence in the literature, teacher and learner views and course materials would have suggested.

On the other hand, consonant phonemes (particularly /t/, /p/, /k/ and /f/) were the source of much unintelligibility. These sounds are *similar but not identical* to English /t/, /p/, /k/ and /f/. The learners in the sample tended to aspirate these voiceless French consonants, sometimes leading to confusion with their voiced counterparts /d/, /b/, /g/ and /v/, and sometimes quite different consonant sounds. Only a minority of the course materials examined touch on consonants at all, and even these texts do not give them the prominence that their role as a source of unintelligibility in the samples of learner pronunciation suggests they merit.

This finding tends to militate against the thesis of contrastive analysis that the greatest difficulties will arise with those features of the target language which are "furthest" from the learner's mother tongue ("degree of difference equals degree of difficulty"). Rather it supports the view that areas of similarity but slight difference may cause particular difficulty as the learner will be probably less aware of the difference and is therefore more likely to realise the phoneme in the manner typical of his/her first language. This corresponds to the views expressed by Valdman (1976) and Flege (1986), cited in chapter three above.

It is interesting to compare the information from the first elicitation instrument with the findings of Nott's survey (1994). The use of slightly different categories to describe learners' pronunciation errors makes comparisons difficult at times. However,

for some features of pronunciation it is possible to compare the errors of that type as a percentage of total errors noted.

Feature	As a percentage of total errors noted	
	This study *(first instrument)*	*Nott (1994)*
Consonants	23%	10.4%
Oral vowels	22%	25.7%
Nasal vowels	13%	17%
/R/	9%	5.6%
Intonation	7%	6.5%
Mute final consonant	6%	8.7%
Semi-vowels	3%	4%

Table 8.1 Comparison of the present research with Nott (1994).

With the exception of the problems posed by French consonant phonemes, the percentages are remarkably similar. This is particularly interesting given that all of the participants in Nott's study were at a significantly higher level of French than my learners. This suggests that the same general features cause problems for anglophone learners of French at all levels, although, of course, we would expect the specific form taken by the difficulties and their frequency to vary according to the learners' level.

Among the vowel sounds, Nott (p.13) notes a high incidence of problems with /y/. Contrastive analysis suggests that this is likely, given that /y/ does not exist in English.

Nott (p.13) expresses surprise that /R/ did not pose a greater difficulty (as contrastive analysis would predict). In my survey although /R/ appeared as a significant source of difficulty, it was as a problem of sound insertion by the learners rather than simple mispronunciation of the phoneme. This tends to run counter to some of the views expressed in the teacher survey, where /R/ was seen as a major problem.

The learner pronunciation study also suggested a major role for orthography as a cause of pronunciation error, particularly in the learners' pronunciation of mute final consonants and mute final "e" as /e/.

As has already been noted above, the only suprasegmental feature which is at all prominent in course materials, and was mentioned regularly by teachers and learners, is intonation. Contrastive analysis proposes that English-speaking learners are likely to encounter difficulties where a question is signalled by intonation alone, word order remaining unchanged from an affirmative phrase.

This predicted area of difficulty did in fact occur on several occasions in the first learner language elicitation activity. However, there were also cases of the learners using rising intonation for affirmative phrases, which cannot be ascribed to transfer from English. A possible explanation is that many learners are aware that intonation is different on occasions between French and English, and a sort of *overcompensation* takes place, with the learner using an intonation pattern which is characteristic of neither French nor English. In other words, a learner confusion over differences between the two languages results in error in an area of similarity.

Other than for intonation, the learner samples provided little information about the suprasegmental features of French phonology.

8.4.2 The second elicitation instrument: picture description

Due to the "global" manner in which intelligibility was assessed by this instrument, the data did not allow for an analysis of any clear causal links between categories of pronunciation error and comprehensibility. Any attempt to ascribe given breakdowns in intelligibility to particular features in the learners' pronunciation would be extremely (and probably unacceptably) speculative.

8.4.3 The third elicitation instrument: reading aloud

Although the categories of individual phoneme mispronunciation by learners were often in the areas described by teachers, learners, course materials and the literature of contrastive analysis, in many cases these individual phonemic mispronunciations did not seem to be the root cause of breakdowns in intelligibility. Where this did occur, it seems to be linked to a rapid succession of mispronounced individual phonemes (for example, learner 6). In the case of learners 2 and 3, departure from the normal speech rhythms of French appears to have been the central feature causing loss of comprehensibility. Isolated phonemic mispronunciation was often susceptible to

clarification on a second listening. This clarification was much less frequent where the loss of intelligibility appeared to lie in suprasegmental features.

8.4.4 The three instruments compared

In the learner pronunciation of the word lists and short phrases there were 101 instances of unintelligibility out of 430 utterances. That is to say that 23.48 per cent of utterances contained a mispronunciation serious enough to make the listener "hear" a word or phrase which was not that which the speaker intended (a success rate of 76.52 per cent). As noted in the foregoing analysis, the great majority of these mispronunciations were individual phonemic errors.

In the picture description there was a 70 per cent success rate for the listener correctly identifying the right picture. 84.70 per cent of utterances were successfully reconstructed by the listener. This involved the listener "filling in" individual parts of the utterance based on the linguistic and situational context. The most obvious point to note here is that these "filled in" utterances would presumably have been unintelligible had they been heard separately from their surrounding language or decontextualised by the absence of the picture. This confirms research cited in Crystal (1987: 147): single words were cut out of a tape recording of intelligible continuous speech; when these were played back to listeners there was great difficulty in making a correct identification. This suggests that the intelligibility of learner pronunciation is not a hard and fast "fact" but is, in fact, dependent on the linguistic and situational context in which an utterance occurs.

Nevertheless, three of the speakers did not give information which allowed for correct identification of the right picture. It is impossible to say whether this was due to pronunciation errors or other linguistic features. Neither can segmental or suprasegmental errors be clearly recognised as responsible for unintelligibility.

Although the read-aloud instrument was intended to pinpoint causes of breakdowns in intelligibility, the nature of the instrument makes it impossible to give a quantitative expression of the results. The listener's comments suggest a much greater (perhaps even primary) role for suprasegmental pronunciation errors in intelligibility loss.

Dickerson's research (1975) found that individual phonemes were correctly pronounced most frequently in word-list reading and least frequently in free speech, with reading aloud somewhere in between. The current research, including segmental and suprasegmental features, throws a different light on the problem. It appears to be the case that the shorter the utterance the greater the role played by individual phonemes in comprehensibility, the longer the utterance the greater is the role played by suprasegmental features, particularly rhythm. Seen from another angle, it could be said that the nature of pronunciation error noted will be determined, at least to some degree, by the nature of the elicitation instrument employed.

Whilst the first elicitation instrument is helpful in identifying which phonemes cause intelligibility problems when pronounced in isolated words, it does not necessarily help to understand those features of learner pronunciation which will cause a breakdown in comprehensibility in longer passages of connected speech. We may be better able to identify priorities for a programme of instruction based on individual phonemes, but we do not know whether this is, in fact, the best basis for teaching and learning second language phonology.

8.5 Speaking, listening and comprehensibility

It is not possible to say with any great degree of confidence what happens when a listener hears speech, as the process of speech recognition cannot be directly observed. Anderson and Lynch (1988) describe a "bottom-up" model, in which the listener makes sense of speech by understanding the "lowest" unit, the phoneme, and then works up to larger units, gradually building up comprehension of the message. The implication of this view for pronunciation teaching and learning is that pedagogy should also focus on individual phonemes.

However, at a "common sense" level, we know that we do not hear neatly demarcated individual phonemes. Attempts to record connected speech and then isolate individual phonemes are invariably unsuccessful. Rather, research suggests that we are conscious of perceiving words or longer units of speech. The listener applies syntactic and semantic information from the whole utterance along with non-linguistic contextual information (such as situational clues or body language) to simultaneously understand the component parts and the whole of what he/she hears. In this "top-down" view,

understanding the whole is a necessary condition for understanding each part. Such a view would imply that pronunciation work should focus on suprasegmental features.

A "compromise" position is proposed by Harmer (2001: 201), who describes a constant interaction between top-down and bottom-up processing. Sometimes it is the individual details which help us to understand the whole; sometimes it is our overview that allows us to process the details. The great majority of individual phonemes must be sufficiently well articulated for words and longer speech units to be recognisable. Yet, at the same time, the linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic whole helps in the identification of the component parts of the utterance, whether this be at a phonemic, syllabic or word level, even when these components are mispronounced.

In light of the above, taken together with the evidence obtained by the research, it seems that we cannot establish a clear rule concerning the gravity of particular types of pronunciation error. There is no clear evidence to suggest that, *on all occasions and under all conditions*, segmental errors are more serious than suprasegmental errors, or vice-versa, or that any one type of error within these two broad categories bears particular responsibility for comprehensibility breakdowns. Loss of intelligibility may arise as a result of different phonological causes according to a number of factors. These include length of utterance, the familiarity of the lexis being used, time available for "rehearsal" of the utterance, the learner's attention being stretched between several transactional and interactional concerns and the presence of contextual clues for the listener (linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic).

This seems to be a specific instance of Canale and Swain's (1980) and Bachman's (1990) model of communicative competence.

Canale and Swain propose that for successful communication to take place linguistic competence (a knowledge of how the grammar, lexis and phonology of a language operate) is not enough. We also require strategic competence (including the ability to manage interactions through coping and repair strategies, such as informed guessing and the use of contextual clues), along with sociolinguistic competence (i.e. social and cultural awareness). Bachman (1990, chapter 4) suggests a similar but more sub-divided model of seven competencies – "language", "organisational", "pragmatic",

"grammatical" (including phonological), "textual", "illocutionary" and "sociolinguistic". Successful communication cannot be reduced to any single one of these factors but will involve all of the competencies being deployed simultaneously.

8.6 Difficulty, accentedness and intelligibility

The research does appear to support the contention that the learner's first language has a major influence on their pronunciation of the target language. This manifests itself, at the most general level, in the existence of clearly recognisable "foreign" accents. More specifically, this influence of the first language is reflected in the existence of the "typical" areas of phonological difficulty for the anglophone learner of French of the type noted and consequent "typical" pronunciation errors.

What is less clear is the extent to which the degree of difficulty for the learner in achieving (near-) native levels of pronunciation of particular aspects of French phonology equals the degree of consequent unintelligibility. In some areas, for example, nasal vowels, there does appear to be a link between the extent of difficulty recognised by learners and resulting instances of unintelligibility. Other features, however, such as the articulation of French /R/, whilst they contribute strongly to the presence of an English accent, do not seem to play a major role in causing incomprehensibility.

In other words, there is not a strict one-to-one relation between difficulty and unintelligibility or accentedness and unintelligibility. Although some correlation exists, the degree of difficulty perceived by learners or their accentedness does not *necessarily* cause comprehensibility to be low in all phonological areas.

The implication of this is that if comfortable intelligibility is accepted as the most important goal of instruction in pronunciation, then the degree to which a particular learner's speech is accented is of secondary concern. Instruction should not focus on global accent reduction, but only on those features of the learner's pronunciation that appear to interfere with listeners' comprehension. In other words, the key issue is not necessarily the number of divergences from the native-speaker norm but, rather, the extent to which each divergence contributes towards unintelligibility. The present research has begun to provide some initial data on which aspects of accentedness in

learner speech interfere with listeners' understanding but, clearly, further work is needed in this area.

8.7 Phonology and orthography: sound and spelling

Both questionnaires and interviews show that teachers and learners alike are convinced that many pronunciation problems for learners have their origins in the relationship between the sound and spelling systems of French. This viewpoint appears to be borne out by the samples of learner speech. Many mispronunciations at a phonemic level, seem to originate in learners' lack of clarity about the relationship of French phonology and orthography.

Unlike German and Spanish, where there are clear and comparatively simple rules governing the relationship between the spoken and written forms of words, but like English, French is an "opaque" language. Nott (1998: 30) comments that:

> Of the most widely-used European languages, French is one in which the system (the set of conventional signs) used for spelling is furthest away from the system (the set of sounds) used in speech.

The origins of this mismatch between the phonology and orthography of French go back several centuries, to periods when changes took place in the way certain sounds were pronounced: these changes were inadequately reflected in changes in spelling. In addition, changes were made to the spelling system in order to make French look more like its distant ancestor, Latin (Nott, 1998: 30).

Among the results of these changes are the fact that two, or even three, vowel letters often correspond to only a single vowel sound. For example, *au* and *eau* both have the same sound as the /o/ sound in *photo*; *ai, ei, aient* are all pronounced the same as the *è* (/ɛ/) in *très*. Just as in some cases different spellings represent the same sound, so in other cases, the same spelling represents a different sound. For example, the written form *en* can be pronounced /ɑ̃/ (*enfant*) at the beginning or in the middle of a word, but is pronounced /ɛ̃/ at the end of a word (*examen*).

A close examination of the samples of learners' speech suggests three ways in which mispronunciation can be induced by the relationship between orthography and phonology. In some cases, learners seem to be unaware of the orthography/phonology relationships existing in French and pronounce written forms as though the relationship between spelling and sound was identical to the English system. This often occurs with French/English cognate words, such as *théâtre*.

In other instances, mispronunciations appear to originate in an incomplete understanding of the complexities of French spelling/sound relations. These are often same spelling/different sound examples, and may appear in vowels or consonants, such as *en* (/ɑ̃/ or /ɛ̃/, according to its word position) or the letter *s*, pronounced /s/ in word-initial position (*silent*), usually pronounced /z/ in the middle of a word (*épouse*) but with some exceptions such as *bourse* (/buRs/). In word-final position the letter *s* is usually silent (e.g. *cours,* /kuR/) although it is occasionally pronounced (e.g. *ours,* /uRs/).

A third type of spelling induced pronunciation error is where the French system is itself inconsistent. For example *ll* can be pronounced as the semi-vowel /j/ (*fille, vanille*) or the consonant /l/ (*ville, mille*). Word final consonants are usually silent (*nord, tabac*), but there are significant exceptions (*sud, parc*) with no rule to govern when to pronounce or not pronounce.

Examples of all three of these error-types can be found in the speech samples, the questionnaires and the interview transcripts. As one teacher-interviewee comments, the incidence of spelling induced mispronunciation may be particularly high for anglophone students learning in Britain, due to the fact that their contact with the spoken language is usually limited to a couple of hours a week and between lessons they only encounter the written forms of French.

8.8 Implications for teaching and learning

The views expressed by teachers and materials writers, and the choices they make in selection of phonological areas for instruction and activity types, may reflect (consciously or unconsciously) different attitudes to languages themselves and how

they are learned: for instance, the relationship between conscious learning and acquisition or cognitive processing and behaviouristic habit formation.

Teachers or materials writers who prioritise conscious learning are likely to favour an explicit explanation of how the French phonological system operates on the basis that learners can only accurately produce language if they have declarative knowledge of its "rules". The learner will apply this knowledge to his/her own language output by means of cognitive processing. A strong partisan of sub-conscious language acquisition, on the other hand, is likely to emphasise massive exposure to native-speaker pronunciation in naturalistic contexts in the belief that this will be assimilated by the learner as a function of the volume of input without explicit attention being drawn to particular phonological items. Learner use will develop primarily as a result of the availability of practice opportunities. A behaviourist type approach might emphasise the learner's recognition of discrete phonemes and suprasegmental features she/she hears presented in a carefully graded order. Recognition will be turned into accurate reproduction through the use of repetitive practice drills.

Likewise, opinions on the source of unintelligibility in learner pronunciation will influence approaches to teaching. For example, if auditory discrimination of unfamiliar phonemes is held to be a major problem, then this implies an emphasis on minimal-pair type listening activities. If spelling-sound relationships are held to be paramount, then pride of place will go to teaching an awareness of the rules governing these relations. Exercises might include dictation (sound to spelling) and reading aloud (spelling to sound). If the physical articulation of French phonemes is considered to be the main source of difficulty, then this could be approached cognitively through detailed teacher explanation, learner understanding and practice of the necessary position of the speech organs. Alternatively, a more mechanistic language laboratory "listen-repeat-record-listen" series of pronunciation drills could be used to overcome the sound production "habits" of the first language and make the physical formation of target language sounds more automatic to the learner.

However, the foregoing research suggests that it is not possible to establish a single over-riding cause of unintelligibility in learners' pronunciation in terms of the global segmental and suprasegmental systems or within either of the systems.

Mispronunciations leading to incomprehensibility have a variety of causes and are influenced by the nature of the utterance and discourse conditions.

Neither is there a single explanation of learner error. We cannot explain all learner mispronunciations exclusively by reference to any particular aspect of knowledge (for example, the relation between orthography and phonology or the rules for applying liaison) or physical capacities (for example, auditory discrimination of particular phonemes or the positioning of the organs of speech for the articulation of specific sounds).

Course materials which offer no explicit pronunciation instruction programme seem to be based on the assumption that rich exposure by itself enables learners both to hear the target language phonology accurately and adjust their own speech to conform to the native-speaker model (Krashen, 1981), that they will be able to use "input" for "intake" (Corder, 1981).

However, learners' first priority in listening to the target language is usually to understand its meaning. Understanding, whether for gist or detail, does not in itself mean that speech sounds can be accurately recognised and appropriately imitated. The learners' attention has to be consciously directed to relevant phonological features and opportunities for practice provided. Furthermore, there is research evidence that instruction can be measurably beneficial in improving second language pronunciation (Champagne-Muzar, et al. 1993; Pennington, 1998).

Correction of pronunciation errors by itself is unlikely to provide an adequate teaching and learning strategy. Firstly, it is highly questionable just how effective correction is as a teaching strategy (Ellis, 1994). If a learner is speaking and engaged in communication his/her focus will be on conveying and understanding meanings rather than on the detail of language forms. Even if correction is handled sensitively, in order not to discourage the learner from speaking, an untimely correction will probably disrupt what may otherwise be a successful act of oral communication.

Secondly, if correction is the starting point of pronunciation teaching, the teacher will be constantly faced with decisions on what to correct, when to correct, who to correct

and how to correct. He/she will be reactive rather than proactive. The focus will always be on where learners are coming from (i.e., their errors or, put more positively, their L1 influenced interlanguage) rather than where they are (hopefully) going to (i.e., the desirable target language pronunciation system and models).

This implies the need for comprehensive programmes of instruction which can address what Guimbretière (1994: 9) describes as the *savoir* and *savoir-faire* of second-language phonology and MacCarthy (1975: 1) calls *understanding* and *practice*. A combined approach is needed. The learner needs to understand the key phonological features of the target language in order to have a framework into which to fit the mass of detail.

Nevertheless, *knowledge about* the phonology of a foreign language is only valuable if it goes hand-in-hand with *practice*, that is to say, training the ear and the speech organs to recognise and produce the sounds of the target language separately and in connected speech. Recognition is a necessary step for accurate reproduction, but presenting French sounds and speech patterns which are different from English sounds and speech patterns and urging learners to imitate these is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure accurate pronunciation. Unless the learner is a particularly gifted mimic, an indication of *how* French phonology is produced is likely to be needed.

It is not sufficient to focus on one area of the phonological system. A learner may be able to articulate perfectly each phoneme in the phrase *il a mal au dos* in isolation – /i/, /l/, /a/, /m/, /a/, /l/, /o/, /d/, /o/, but if he/she is not aware of the open syllabification of French the pronunciation of the complete utterance as
/il a mal o do/ rather than /i la ma lo do/ may cause unintelligibility. Segmental and suprasegmental areas of French phonology must both be addressed.

The problems stemming from the relationship between spelling and sound in French should be addressed at the level of both knowledge and practice. Learners need to be aware of the "rules" of the French phonological system but they also need to practice: to *listen with their eyes* and *read with their ears*, so to speak. Listening materials used in conjunction with transcriptions (complete or partial) could be utilised for this

purpose. An awareness of the phonemic alphabet would enable learners to use their dictionaries more effectively. The pronunciation of "new" words could be established and learned (alongside their meaning) without the learner having to hear the word spoken several times by his/her teacher.

Conclusion

A comprehensive and balanced programme for pronunciation teaching and learning does not establish a hierarchy between segmental and suprasegmental features. Neither aspect has precedence over the other in selecting or sequencing features to be taught. Both must be present from the beginning and both must be continually recycled. Neither should such a programme prioritise any particular type of activity. Just as the causes of unintelligibility are varied, so will be the range of activity types needed for learners' pronunciation to improve.

Such a programme of instruction presupposes that the teacher is him/herself aware of all of the key features of French phonology and ways in which they can be taught and learned. Moreover, materials must be available to present these features and provide practice opportunities.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, these two conditions are far from being completely fulfilled. If French phonology is to be more successfully learned by adult anglophone learners, then these issues must be addressed by teachers and materials publishers alike.

Chapter Nine

Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

I stated in chapter 1 that one goal of this study was to ascertain the views of teachers and learners concerning the phonological difficulties facing adult anglophone learners of French (question themes one and two).

- Which aspects of French phonology do teachers perceive as major causes of unintelligibility and/or difficulty for their learners?

- Which aspects of French phonology do learners perceive as major causes of unintelligibility and/or difficulty?

I also wished to investigate whether the actual work of teachers and learners on pronunciation matched their opinions on areas of difficulty (question themes three and four).

- Which aspects of French phonology are consciously taught? How are they taught?

- Which aspects of French phonology are consciously learned? How are they learned?

A further theme was the extent to which pronunciation work in published course materials reflected, or were reflected in, the views of teachers and learners (question theme five).

- Do existing teaching/learning materials address perceived areas of phonological unintelligibility and/or difficulty? What are their priorities?

These questions were approached through surveys of teachers and learners and a study of literature (both academic and pedagogical). Finally, the data gathered in these areas was related to an analysis of the actual pronunciation of a small group of adult

learners to decide whether there existed a "match" between *perceived* problems and solutions and a detailed analysis of samples of learner pronunciation (question theme six).

- Does an analysis of learner pronunciation confirm the perceptions of difficulty/unintelligibility held by teachers and learners and/or the priorities of teaching/learning materials?

In this chapter I will comment on whether (and to what extent) the research questions have been answered and consider some important implications of the information obtained for classroom practice. I will also consider whether the research appears to have revealed any information of interest which was not foreseen in the original project design. Finally, I will evaluate the research itself and make some suggestions for future investigations in the area.

9.2 Have the questions been answered?

The surveys of teachers and learners and the literature studies underpinning the research on question themes one to five have produced data which is both valid and reliable (in the sense of chapter five above).

In relation to question themes one, two and five, there is a high level of agreement between teachers, learners and published course materials on which areas of French phonology are likely to cause particular difficulty and/or unintelligibility for adult anglophone learners. Specifically, these are individual phonemes, particularly those which do not exist in English, such as nasal vowels, the semi-vowels /j/ and /ɥ/ in combination with /œ/ and sounds such as /y/ and /R/. These views tend to reflect a fairly "traditional" contrastive analysis approach found in the applied linguistic literature of the 1960s and 1970s. The more recent emphasis on suprasegmental features of phonology finds much less reflection in the surveyed groups and course materials.

In respect of question themes three and four, individual phonemes tend to be at the centre of the teaching and learning priorities for the surveyed teachers and learners,

accurately reflecting their expressed views. However, in relation to approaches to the *practice* of pronunciation learning there is much less unanimity, with teachers and learners exhibiting a wide range of beliefs, methods and activities.

When we come to question theme six, we find that intelligibility breaks down in several distinct areas of the French phonological system. No single feature of French pronunciation (either in the realisation of individual vowel or consonant phonemes or the various suprasegmental aspects) has a dominant role in causing unintelligibility when learners speak.

Comprehensibility problems occur across the whole system and they appear to have their origins in a multiplicity of features of language learning and use. In some cases, the problems seem to stem from learner difficulty in hearing those features which make French phonology distinct from English, either the acoustic quality of individual sounds, differences between individual sounds or the phonological features of connected speech such as rhythm or intonation. In other cases, learners appear to be able to hear but cannot produce the required sounds either individually or in combination.

As well as these auditory and articulatory difficulties, a major role seems to be played by the learners' attempts to "translate" the French spelling system into sounds. Incomplete knowledge and/or misapplication of the relation between the two systems in French seems to be a major cause of unintelligibility.

Finally, discourse conditions, such as the length of a required utterance, lack of opportunity for "rehearsal" or unfamiliarity of the subject may also all induce mispronunciation.

In the next section I will consider what implications the above comments may have for classroom practice.

9.3 Implications for Practice

The fact that learner pronunciation problems cannot be localised in a single area or ascribed to a single cause implies that teaching and learning strategies must be

similarly multi-stranded. A successful approach to teaching and learning French pronunciation should include all of the distinctive aspects of the phonological system and must provide a balance of knowledge and practice, *savoir* and *savoir faire*. Neither one precedes the other – both types of work are necessary for learning to take place and they are mutually interdependent.

In terms of knowledge, learners must become aware of the general features of French pronunciation – particularly the low tongue position, role of the lips in articulation and tension of the speech organs (see chapter two above). They need sensitising to similarities and differences between the sounds of French and English at the level of individual sounds and in connected speech. Listening activities can have a pronunciation focus as well as being used to develop comprehension skills.

Learners must become familiar with the sounds of French both receptively and productively. Practice is required to discriminate between similar sounds (for example, /e/ and /ɛ/) and to recognise sounds which may not exist in English (for example /y/). The production of new sounds requires knowledge and practice. Some learners may be able to "listen and repeat", but many others will benefit from general guidance on lip or tongue position or the required degree of muscular tension. Once learners can recognise the sounds of French, considerable practice is needed to extend this receptive skill into the ability to reproduce the sounds individually and combined together in words.

Recognition and reproduction of the features of connected speech is equally important. Learners must be able to recognise different rhythm structures and intonation patterns as well as when liaison or elision takes place. Again, this involves both knowledge of the French system along with receptive and productive practice activities. The fact that I have mentioned individual sounds before suprasegmental features of French phonology does not imply that teaching and learning should be sequenced in this way: work on both aspects of pronunciation should take place simultaneously, equally balanced, from the beginning of the learning process.

Learners need to recognise the sound/spelling patterns of French and how these differ from English. Assuming that learners are learning primarily for oral language use, the sounds of new language should precede written forms in order that spelling does not induce pronunciation problems. However, unless learners become familiar with the links between sound and spelling in French, they will never be able to pronounce new words which they have encountered in written form but not heard pronounced. For the same reason, phonemic symbols can be introduced gradually to enable learners to be more confident in working out the pronunciation of new words encountered in their dictionaries.

Instances of intelligibility breakdown caused by discourse conditions will gradually diminish as a function of learners increasing their oral ability and confidence. This requires plentiful practice opportunities for oral interaction but does not have a specific pronunciation focus as intelligibility loss cannot be ascribed to any particular aspect of French phonology.

The approach outlined above is very consciously eclectic. This eclecticism flows from the research findings that the sources of unintelligibility in learner pronunciation are themselves extremely varied and have a wide range of causes. Certain activity types may be appropriate within this framework without necessarily committing the teacher to any particular overarching methodology or set of beliefs.

Thus, the suggestion that it is necessary for the learners to know about sound/spelling patterns does not imply that "knowledge" is somehow more important than "use", merely that appropriate knowledge may be a precondition for more successful use. Neither would the use of minimal pair type activities for recognition and production of phonemes imply that individual sounds are more important than suprasegmental features, merely that the perception and production of individual phonemes are *part of* the challenge facing learners in their acquisition of comfortably intelligible French pronunciation.

However, eclecticism can only be successful if it is conscious and its different elements are directed appropriately. For this to be the case, the teacher needs a

systematic plan for teaching pronunciation based on the foregoing analysis and proposals.

Although it is often useful to isolate particular elements of pronunciation and devote activities specifically to them, every lesson involving oral interaction can be, to some extent, a pronunciation lesson. This means more than simply "correcting" on a haphazard basis. Rather, the teacher can plan to focus on particular phonological features of connected speech, such as rhythm, intonation, liaison or elision.

Finally, the teachers' and learners' tasks would be made easier by the integration of this type of approach into teaching and learning materials at all levels. Although the concrete forms of pronunciation problems vary at different learner levels, the root causes appear to have much in common. General course materials should be adapted to better reflect learners' pronunciation needs. Moreover, whilst a number of French publishers have produced materials specifically geared to phonology, these are often difficult for British-based teachers and learners to obtain. Teaching and learning would both be made easier by the availability of print and audio-based resources based on the foregoing analysis and proposals.

9.4 "Windfall" learning occasioned by the research

Although they had not been central to the original conception of the research questions, the investigation provided significant information in two related areas. These were, firstly, the relationship between learner pronunciation difficulties and intelligibility; secondly, the relationship between foreign accentedness and intelligibility.

Although, in both cases, there is a relationship, the different categories are not identical. The research seems to suggest that the areas of pronunciation which learners find "difficult" (and in which teachers report "difficulty") are not necessarily always the same as those in which intelligibility breaks down. The notion of *difficulty* describes a perceived feature of the learning process, whereas *intelligibility* is a feature of language in use.

Similarly, the existence of a strong "English accent" in certain phonological areas does not always signify incomprehensibility. Maximising intelligibility in speech, as a goal of teaching and learning, will not necessarily be *identical* to reduction or elimination of a foreign accent.

9.5 Evaluating the Research

Whilst the research has answered many of the questions to which it was addressed, a number of problems with the learner pronunciation elicitation instruments became apparent.

The first instrument (words and phrases in isolation) illustrated primarily segmental errors, focussing on incidence and quantity. However, it is questionable whether we can conclude that these mispronunciations would necessarily have led to incomprehensibility in "normal" connected speech. I have commented elsewhere (for example, pages 181-182 above) that connected speech is more than a simple adding together of individual phonemes or even words. In authentic speaking situations there are often visual or situational clues which can help the listener to decode speech which might otherwise be incomprehensible. Likewise, the linguistic context provided by connected speech might provide language clues which help a listener to comprehend words which might be incomprehensible if heard in isolation. In short, there was a lot of control but little naturalism.

The second elicitation instrument (picture description), whilst it provided a visual context and a communicative purpose for the learners' speech, was weak in other respects. Its "global" nature enabled us to identify *when* intelligibility had broken down but not *why*. In terms of significant data produced by the instrument (that is data whose analysis could help to answer the research questions), the amount of information obtained was minimal. There was a good degree of naturalism in the process but little control.

The third elicitation instrument (the read-aloud texts) attempted to reconcile the naturalism of connected speech with a degree of control over what was said in order to make analysis more practical. This was only partly successful. It was possible to overcome some of the problems of reading aloud a written text by choosing passages

which had originated in speech. Nevertheless, the fact that the learners were reading aloud someone else's words (with the other person's lexical and structural choices) may have been enough to induce certain pronunciation errors. Although there was an "original" to refer to when the learner's speech was incomprehensible, this in itself did not explain *why* the speech was incomprehensible. Explanatory analysis had to come from discussion between the listener and researcher which was inevitably subjective at times.

In mitigation, it could be said that the different weaknesses of each instrument were compensated for by the strengths of the others and this was, in fact, a consideration in choosing to use three instruments. However, it is impossible not be aware of the fact that the data obtained was significantly influenced by the methods used to obtain it. Any attempt to repeat and improve upon the current research would need to take this into account.

9.6 Suggestions for further research

One way in which the foregoing reservations concerning the methodology of the learner pronunciation elicitation instruments might be addressed would be to repeat this part of the research using a tool which allowed for a comparison of the comprehensibility of the same words spoken in isolation and as part of connected speech. This might help to improve our understanding of the relative roles of segmental and suprasegmental features and the importance of linguistic and situational context in relation to phonological intelligibility.

Another area for research might be a consideration of *qualities*, rather than *quantities*, of mispronunciation. We have seen that the mispronunciation of certain features does not seem to compromise intelligibility in a major way. Other types of mispronunciation, on the other hand, do seem to be more often associated with breakdowns in intelligibility. In principle, such research might help to establish clearer priorities within the kind of balanced teaching and learning programme outlined above.

Can we learn more about *causality* in the formation of the views which were uncovered in the teacher and learner questionnaires and interviews? To what extent

are learners' views on pronunciation formed by what they have heard from their teachers? To what degree are the teachers' views determined by the course materials with which they work? Are course materials based on classroom experience or do they decide what happens in the classroom? These questions might provide a direction in which the questionnaire/interview/materials review chapters of the present research could be extended.

The present research has demonstrated the difficulties of trying to use "experimental" methods in the language classroom. However, might it be possible to use a *quasi-experimental* approach to put to the test the contention that a broad, balanced and inclusive approach to teaching and learning is required? Small groups of learners could have the comprehensibility of their pronunciation "measured". They could then be exposed to different types of instruction before being "measured" again. The differences could be based on distinct areas of the phonological system (e.g. segmentals versus suprasegmentals) or on different teaching methods and activities (e.g. conscious learning versus acquisition through exposure). The methodological design would be a nightmare and any "results" would have be treated with great caution. Nevertheless, some kind of activity of this type would be a logical follow-up to the present research.

A similar approach could be taken to study different types of learner strategies and practice.

9.7 Conclusion

The realisation of this research project has produced some answers to the questions that were posed at its conception. It has also raised many more questions, some of which are listed above as possible areas for further research. If it has helped to clarify understanding of the issues it has addressed or stimulates anyone to continue the research in related areas, then I feel that it has been successful.

Bibliography

Abercrombie, D. (1949) "Teaching Pronunciation" in *English Language Teaching* 3, 113-122.

Abercrombie, D. (1967) *Elements of General Phonetics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Anderson, A., and Lynch, T. (1988) *Listening*, Oxford: OUP.

Anderson-Hsieh, J., R. Johnson and K. Koehler. (1992) "The Relationship Between Native Speaker Judgements of Non-Native Speaker Pronunciation and Deviance in Segmentals, Prosody and Syllable Structure" in *Language Learning* 42:4, December 1992, 529-555.

Arthur, L. and Hurd, S., eds. (1992) *The Adult Language Learner*. London: CILT.

Bachman, L. (1990) *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. Oxford: OUP.

Battye, A. and Hintze, M. A. (1992) *The French Language Today*, London: Routledge.

Birks, R., R.Udris, and C. O'Neil (1998) *Le français en gros plans*. Paris: Didier.

Bougard, M-T., and D. Bourdais (1994) *The French Experience*. London: BBC Books.

Bowen, T. and Marks, J. (1992) *The Pronunciation Book*. Harlow: Longman.

Bowler, B. and Cunningham, S. (1992) *Headway Upper-Intermediate Pronunciation*. Oxford: OUP.

Bowler, B. and Parminter, S. (1992) *Headway Pre-Intermediate Pronunciation*. Oxford: OUP.

Bras, M. (1975) *Your Guide to French Pronunciation*. Paris: Larousse.

Brown, A. (1992a) "Twenty Questions" in Brown, A. (1992b), 4-20.

Brown, A., ed. (1992b) *Approaches to Pronunciation Teaching*, London: Macmillan.

Brown, A. (1995) "Minimal Pairs: minimal importance?" *ELT Journal*, 49:2, 169-175.

Brumfitt, C.J. and K. Johnson, eds. (1979) *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*. Oxford: OUP.

Callamand, M. (1981) *Méthodologie de l'enseignement de la prononciation*. Paris: Clé International.

Canale, M. and Swain, M. (1980) "Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to language learning and testing", *Applied Linguistics* 1/1

Capelle, G., N. Guidon, and M. Molinié (1996) *Le Nouvel Espaces 3*. Paris: Hachette.

Carruthers, R. (1987) "Teaching Pronunciation" in Long, M. and Richards, J. (eds.), *Methodology in TESOL*. Rowley Mass: Newbury House.

Carter, J., J. Janetta, J. Langlais and M. Moreton. (1998a) *Nouvelles Perspectives: Découvertes*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Carter, J., J. Janetta, J. Langlais and M. Moreton (1998b) *Nouvelles Perspectives: Repères*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Carton, F. (1974) *Introduction à la phonétique du français*. Paris: Bordas.

Champagne, C. (1984) "French as a Second Language: instruction programmes and materials", *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, XXXI/2

Champagne-Muzar, C., E. Schneiderman and J. Bourdages (1993) "Second Language Accent: the role of the pedagogical environment", *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 1993, 143-60.

Chomsky, N. (1959) "On 'Verbal Behaviour' by B.F. Skinner" *Language* 35, 26-58.

Converse, J.M. and Presser, S. (1986) *Survey Questions: handcrafting the standardized questionnaire*. Beverley Hills: Sage.

Corder, S.P. (1981) *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*. Oxford: OUP.

Corless, F., and R. Gaskell (1986) *Signes du Temps: vécu*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Crystal, D. (1975) *The English Tone of Voice*. London: Edward Arnold.

Crystal, D (1987) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge: CUP.

Cunningham, S. and Bowler, B. (1990) *Headway Intermediate Pronunciation*. Oxford: OUP.

Dalton, C. and Seidelhofer, B. (1994) *Pronunciation*. Oxford: OUP.

De Bot, K. (1986) "The Transfer of Intonation and the Missing Data Base" in Kellerman, E. and Sharwood Smith M. eds. (1986), 110-119.

Delattre, P. (1951) *Principes du phonétique français*. (Place of publication and name of publisher not cited in book).

Delattre, P. (1965) *Comparing the Phonetic Features of English, French, German and Spanish*. London: Harrap.

Denes, P. and Pinson, E. (1963) *La chaîne de Communication Verbale*. Montréal: Editions Théries Frères.

Derwing, T., Munro, M., Wiebe, G. (1998) "Evidence in Favour of a Broad Framework for Pronunciation Instruction", *Language Learning*, 44:1, 75-100.

Dickerson, L. (1975) "Interlanguage as a system of variable rules", *TESOL Quarterly* 9: 401-7.

Dulay, H.C. and M.K. Burt (1973) "Should we teach children syntax?" *Language Learning* 23:2, 245-257.

Ellis, R. (1994) *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: OUP.

Further Education National Training Organisation (2000) *Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning in England and Wales*, London: HMSO

Flege, J. (1986) "Effects of equivalence classification on the production of foreign language speech sounds" in James and Leather eds. (1987).

Galazzi-Matasci, E. and Pedoya-Guimbretière, E. (1983) "Et la pédagogie de la pronunciation?" in *Français dans le monde*, no. 180.

Galisson, P. et al. (1980) *Lignes de forces en didactique de langues étrangères*. Paris: Clé International.

Gardes-Tamine, J. (1990) *La Grammaire: phonologie, morphologie, lexicologie*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Garnier, M., and J. Picard (1996) *The French Experience 2*. London: BBC Books.

Girardet, J., and J-M. Cridlig (1996a) *Panorama 1*. Paris: Clé International.

Girardet, J., and J-M. Cridlig (1996b) *Panorama 2*. Paris: Clé International.

Goldie, J. et al. (1991) *Harrap's Shorter French and English Dictionary*. Edinburgh: Harrap.

Grauberg, W. (1997) *The Elements of Foreign Language Teaching*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Guimbretière, E. (1994) *Phonétique et l'enseignement de l'oral*. Paris: Didier/Hatier

Hancock, M. (1995) *Pronunciation Games*. Cambridge: CUP

Harlow, L. and Mayskens, J. (1994) "Priorities for intermediate-level language instruction", *Modern Language Journal* 78, 141-154.

Harmer, J. (2001) *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman.

Haycraft, B. (1992) "Sentence Stress For More Meaningful Speech" in Brown ed. (1992b), 57-72.

Howatt, A.P.R. (1984) *A History of English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hymes, D. (1972) "On Communicative Competence" in Pride and Holmes eds. (1972)

Ioup, G. (1984) "Is there a structural foreign accent? A comparison of syntactic and phonological errors in second language acquisition" in *Language Learning* volume 34, 1-17.

Ioup, G. and S. Weinberger (1987) *Interlanguage Phonology: the Acquisition of a Second Language Sound System*. Cambridge Mass.: Newbury House.

James, A. (1989) "Linguistic Theory and Second Language Phonology Learning: a Perspective and Some Proposals" in *Applied Linguistics* Vol. 10, 365-81.

James, A. and J. Leather eds. (1987) *Sound Patterns in Second Language Acquisition*. Dordrecht: Fortis.

James, C. (1980) *Contrastive Analysis*. London: Longman.

James, C. (1998) *Errors in Language Learning and Use: exploring error analysis*. London: Longman.

Johnson, S. (1755) *A Dictionary of the English Language*. London: W. Strahan. Cited in Howatt (1984).

Kaneman-Pougatch , M., M. di Giura, S. Trevesi and D. Jennepin. (1997) *Café Crème*. Paris/Cheltenham: Hachette/European Schoolbooks.

Kaneman-Pougatch, M., and E. Pedoya-Guimbretière. (1991) *Plaisir des sons*. Paris: Hatier/Didier.

Kellerman, E. and Sharwood Smith, M. (1986) *Cross Linguistic Influence in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Kenworthy, J. (1987) *Teaching English Pronunciation*. London: Longman.

Krashen, S. (1981) *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Lado, R. (1957) *Linguistics Across Cultures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Léon, M. and Léon, P. (1997) *La prononciation du français*. Paris: Nathan.

Léon, P. (1996) *Phonétisme et prononciation du français*. Paris: Nathan.

Littlewood, W. (1984) *Foreign and Second Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacCarthy, P. (1975) *The Pronunciation of French*. London: OUP.

Macdonald, D., Yule, G., Powers, M. (1994) "Attempts to Improve English L2 Pronunciation: the variable effects of different types of instruction", *Language Learning* 44:1, 75-100.

McDonough, J. and McDonough, S. (1997) *Research Methods for English Language Teachers*. London: Arnold.

McEwan, S., G. Pickard, and M. Smith (1989) *Décollage*. Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes,

Magee, B. (1973) *Popper*. London: Collins.

Malécot, A. (1977) *Introduction à la phonétique française*. The Hague: Mouton.

Major, R. (1987) "The Natural Phonology of Second Language Acquisition" in James and Leather eds. (1987).

Marchand, F. ed. (1975) *La phonétique et ses applications*. Paris: Delagrave.

Martinet, A. and Walter, H. (1973) *Dictionnaire de la prononciation français dans son usage réel*. Paris: France Expansion.

Miège, G. (1685) *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre l'anglais*. London: Thomas Bassett. Cited in Howatt (1984).

Morley, D. ed. (1987) *Current Perspectives on Pronunciation*. Washington D.C.: TESOL.

Morley, J. ed. (1994) *Pronunciation Pedagogy and Theory*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Moys, A. (1985) *France Extra*. London: BBC Books.

Munro, M. and Derwing, T. (1999) "Foreign Accent, Comprehensibility and Intelligibility in the Speech of Second Language Learners" in *Language Learning* 49: supplement 285-310.

Nott, D. (1994) "Pronunciation: does it matter?" in *Francophonie* 9, 2-17.

Nott, D. (1998) *French Grammar Explained*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Nunan, D. (1992) *Research Methods in Language Learning*. Cambridge: CUP.

Nunan, D. (1995) *Language Teaching Methodology*. Hemel Hempstead: Phoenix ELT.

Odlin, T. (1989) *Language Transfer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Office for National Statistics (2002) www.statistics.gov.uk

Page, B. (1984) *A vous la France*. London: BBC Books.

Pennington, M.C. and Richards, J.C. (1986) "Pronunciation Revisited" in *TESOL Quarterly*. 20. 207-25.

Pennington, M. C. (1998) "The Teachability of Phonology in Adulthood", *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, vol. Xxxvi/4, 323-341.

Pillette, M., and B. Clarke (1999) *Objectif Bac 1*. London: Collins.

Pillette, M., and S. Graham (1999) *Objectif Bac 2*. London: Collins.

Price, G. (1991) *An Introduction to French Pronunciation*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Pride, J. and J. Holmes eds. (1972) *Sociolinguistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Pritchard, R. (1985) "The Teaching of French Intonation to Native Speakers of English" in *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 1985, pp 133-147.

Richards, J.C. (1971) "A non-contrastive approach to error analysis" *English Language Teaching* 25:3, 204-219.

Richards, J.C. ed. (1974) *Error Analysis: perspectives on second language acquisition*. London: Longman.

Richards, J.C. ed. (1978) *Understanding Second and Foreign Language Learning*. Rowley Mass.: Newbury House.

Ross, D. (1992) Review of Brown, A. (ed.) *Teaching English Pronunciation* in *Language Learning* 42:3, 441-4.

Ross, P.H., Wright, J.D. and Anderson, A.B. eds. (1983) *Handbook of Survey Research*. New York: Academic Press.

Rybak, S. (1996) *New Breakthrough French*. London: Macmillan.

Seliger, H.W. and Shohamy, E. (1989) *Second Language Research Methods*. Oxford: OUP.

Selinker, L. (1972) "Interlanguage" in Richards ed. (1974), 201-231.

Sheatsley, P.B. (1983) "Questionnaire construction and item writing" in Ross, P.H., Wright, J.D. and Anderson, A.B. (eds.) *Handbook of Survey Research*. New York: Academic Press.

Simonin, J. (1975) "Phonétique et éducation des sons" in Marchand, F. ed. (1975).

Skinner, B.F. (1957) *Verbal Behaviour*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Smith, L.E. and C. Nelson (1985) "International Intelligibility of English: directions and resources" *World Englishes* 4, 333-342. Cited in Brown (1992b)

Stockwell R., J.D. Bowen, and J.W. Martin (1965) *The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Cited in Littlewood (1984).

Swan, M. and B. Smith eds. (1987) *Learner English: a teacher's guide to interference and other problems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Swan, M. and C. Walter (1984) *The Cambridge English Course, Teachers Book*. Cambridge: CUP.

Sweet, H. (1899) *The Practical Study of Languages*. London: Dent. Cited in Howatt (1984).

Tarone, E. (1978) "The Phonology of Interlanguage" in Richards ed. (1978), pp 15-33.

Taylor, D. (1993) "Intonation and Accent in English: what teachers need to know", *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 31:1, 1-21.

Tench, P. (1996) "Methodology in Phonology Interlanguage", *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, XXXIV/4, 241-260.

Thornton, B. (1996) "Attitudes to learning foreign languages: a preliminary report" in Cortazzi, M., Hall, B. and Rafik Galea, S. (eds.) *Proceedings of the Research Students' Conference* 69-80. (Place of publication and publisher's name not given.)

Tranel, B. (1987) *The Sounds of French*: an introduction. Cambridge: CUP.

Underhill, A. (1994) *Sound Foundations*. London: Heinemann.

Valdman, A. (1976) *Introduction to French Phonology and Morphology*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Walker, J. (1791) *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of English*. London: Robinson. Cited in Howatt (1984).

Walter, C. (1987) "French Speakers" in Swan, M. and Smith, B. eds. (1987).

Walter, H. (1977) *La phonologie du français*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Wardhaugh, R. (1970) "The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis", *TESOL Quarterly*, 4/2, 123-30.

Wenk, B. (1986) "Cross Linguistic Influence in Second Language Phonology: Speech Rhythms" in Kellerman and Sharwood Smith eds. (1986).

Wenk, B., and F. Wioland (1982) "Is French really syllable-timed?" *Journal of Phonetics* 10:2, 193-216.

Whitman, R.L., and K.L. Jackson (1972) "The Unpredictability of Contrastive Analysis" *Language Learning*: 22:1, 29-41. Cited in Littlewood (1984).

Widdowson, H. (1978) *Teaching Language as Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Widdowson, H. (1972) "The Teaching of English as Communication" *ELT Journal* 27:1, 15-19. Reprinted in Brumfitt and Johnson eds. (1979).

Wioland, F. (1991) *Prononcer les mots du français*. Paris: Hachette.