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# 1. Introduction

Phonological competence is an integral part of general language ability. In the history of foreign language teaching, the pronunciation component has always been included in the wider curriculum, its extent being determined by current scholarly opinions. The Austrian EFL (English as a foreign language) curriculum for upper-secondary grammar schools states that “[e]ine Annäherung der Aussprache an die Standardaussprache ist [...] wünschenswert“ (BMBWK 2004: 3), and regarding the contents of phonological instruction, the curriculum for lower-secondary grammar schools even demands that “[d]as rezeptive Beherrschen der internationalen Lautschrift [...] als Hilfsmittel bezüglich der Aussprache und Intonation nach Möglichkeit anzustreben [ist]“ (BMBWK 2000: 3). It can therefore be said that the requirements of the curriculum for TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) are quite considerable. The questions this thesis focuses on are whether these curricular demands correspond to current linguistic views on pronunciation teaching, and whether teaching materials and course books available for Austrian schools can help develop and foster the students’ phonological competence in terms of the objectives stated by the curriculum.

The chapter following this introduction will provide definitions and descriptions of general approaches and specific methods and movements within TEFL. Radical changes in the history of EFL teaching have repeatedly caused a transformation of the role and nature of phonological instruction. In order to present an unbiased view of the significance of pronunciation teaching, approaches disregarding phonological issues will also be introduced.

Chapter three is concerned with the relevance of the pronunciation component for EFL learners. Oral communication skills and their importance within overall language ability will be discussed, as well as the definitions and descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Another highly relevant aspect for students is the assessment of pronunciation and speaking performances, which will be addressed in a specifically Austrian context. Current linguistic debates about English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and the role of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) as regards pronunciation teaching in schools will also be dealt with.

Past and present priorities of phonological instruction will be centred on in chapter four. In connection with this, common pronunciation problems of Austrian learners will be

focused on, which proves particularly helpful in the ensuing analyses of pronunciation activities. Chapter five then introduces a number of sample pronunciation tasks and lesson ideas to provide yet another basis for comparison when investigating the effectiveness of teaching materials.

The sixth chapter of the thesis at hand will analyse pronunciation exercises in four EFL textbooks commonly used in Austrian schools, namely *MORE! 3* and *4 Enriched course* (for third- and fourth-year learners of English in lower-secondary grammar school), and *LASER B1+* and *LASER B2* (for grades 9 to 12 of upper-secondary). The individual analyses will mainly be concerned with questions such as whether the tasks are productive, effective and communicative, and whether task progression is noticeable within the two course book series. Different options to adapt certain activities or give additional instructions will also be presented, which might prove especially helpful for EFL practitioners.

Lastly, chapter seven will summarise the most important findings and refer back to the course book analysis to provide a final evaluation of their pronunciation component. Of course, the limitations of this thesis and possible future research foci will also be mentioned.



## **2. Traditions and approaches in pronunciation teaching**

Over the last years, decades and even centuries, a number of different traditions and approaches in teaching English as a foreign language and pronunciation teaching in particular have emerged. Although considered dated by some, many traditional approaches and methods are still in use in English language classrooms today. In the following, a concise overview of the various teaching traditions will be given.

### **2.1 General approaches**

#### **2.1.1 Intuitive-imitative approach**

The intuitive-imitative approach does not provide the learners with explicit linguistic information, but rather relies on their listening and imitation skills in order for them to be able to imitate the sounds and rhythms of the target language in question. A necessary prerequisite of this approach is the availability of good models, which was majorly facilitated by the invention of record players and later of tape recorders, video cassettes and compact discs. Language labs emerged as innovative language learning facilities in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and are still used by a sizeable number of ELT institutions around the world. (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 2)

#### **2.1.2 Analytic-linguistic approach**

In an analytic-linguistic approach, listening, production and imitation are supplemented by underlying linguistic knowledge and tools such as the phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, charts of the vocal apparatus and contrastive information. The learner is explicitly informed about how sounds are produced and how pronunciation works in general. Unlike the intuitive-imitative approach, the focus of the analytic-linguistic approach lies on informing the learners about speech sounds and rhythms. Utilising an analytic-linguistic

approach in the language classroom often means complementing an intuitive-imitative approach, which might be seen as the practice phase of pronunciation teaching and learning, with linguistic meta-knowledge. (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 2)

### **2.1.3 Integrative approach**

An integrative approach considers pronunciation as an integral part of communication, but does not isolate it as a separate sub-skill that needs to be practiced in drills. Rather, pronunciation should be practiced using task-based activities and pronunciation-focused listening tasks. Moreover, the integrative approach traditionally emphasises suprasegmental features that are necessary requirements in extended discourse beyond word and phoneme level. Examples for these would be stress, intonation and rhythm. (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu 2010: 984)

The dual-focus oral communication programme introduced by Morley (1994, referred to in Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu 2010: 984) distinguishes between micro-level instruction that is concerned with the attainment of phonetic-phonological competence through practicing segmentals and suprasegmentals, and macro-level instruction that focuses on the attainment of communicability by developing discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Using language for communicative purposes is at the forefront of this particular programme.

## **2.2 Movements and methods within TEFL**

### **2.2.1 The Reform Movement**

In the 1890s, the so-called Reform Movement made the first contributions to pronunciation teaching that were linguistically and analytically informed. It was phoneticians such as Henry Sweet, Wilhelm Viëtor and Paul Passy, the founders of the International Phonetic

Association, who had an enormous influence on and within the movement. As a science that was committed to describing and analysing the sound systems of languages, phonetics was established. One of the first innovations of the International Phonetic Association was the invention of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Since there was a one-to-one relationship between written symbols and the sounds they represented, it was possible to represent the sounds of any language of the world for the first time. (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 3)

The following notions and practices were particularly advocated by the phoneticians, many of whom had taught foreign languages themselves (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 3):

- The spoken form of a language is primary and should be taught first.
- The findings of phonetics should be applied to language teaching.
- Teachers must have solid training in phonetics.
- Learners should be given phonetic training to establish good speech habits.

These ideas and beliefs still shape some methodologies of pronunciation teaching today. However, some of the points raised by the phoneticians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century have disappeared in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century only to reappeared later. Hence, the influence of Reform-Movement linguists on present-day phonological instruction must not be underestimated.

### **2.2.2 The late 1800s and early 1900s: Direct Method**

In instructional contexts which adopt the so-called Direct Method, foreign language pronunciation is taught through imitation and intuition. Typically, a model – either the teacher or a recording – needs to be imitated and the learners try to approximate this model by imitating and repeating the language that is presented to them. It was thought that this method would be especially beneficial for language learners since it was observed that first language acquisition in children and non-instructional foreign language acquisition in adults resemble each other. (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 3)

A number of so-called naturalistic methods succeeded the Direct Method, even comprehension methods that did not allow any speaking at all until a certain amount of time had been spent on listening. Famous examples of naturalistic approaches are Asher's Total Physical Response and Krashen and Terrell's Natural Approach of the late 1970s and early 1980s respectively. It was argued that learners would be given the opportunity to internalise the sound system of the target language without initially being pressured to speak. The theory behind this method of language instruction was that the learners' pronunciation would be quite good when they were eventually allowed to speak, notwithstanding their lack of explicit pronunciation instruction. (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 3)

### **2.2.3 The 1940s and 1950s: Audiolingual Method and Oral Approach**

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the Audiolingual Method in the US and the Oral Approach in the UK considered oral communication a key feature of foreign language teaching and learning. Similar to Direct Method instruction, the teacher or a recording served as a model, and the learners had to imitate and repeat the sounds or utterances they heard. However, this explicit pronunciation teaching also made use of linguistic knowledge from phonetics, i.e. visual transcription systems (e.g. modified IPA) or articulatory charts. (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu 2010: 985)

The primary teaching technique used in the pronunciation component of Audiolingual Method or Oral Approach instruction was that of minimal pair drills, i.e. drills using words that differ only by a single phoneme in the same position. An example for such a minimal pair drill would be 'sheep' and 'ship', /i:/ and /ɪ/ being the sounds that differ. This notion of making the learners aware of contrasts within one language originated in the early 1930s in structural linguistics. (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 3-4)

### **2.2.4 The 1960s: Cognitive Approach**

The Cognitive Approach of the 1960s led to a change of paradigms as regards pronunciation teaching. Since language learning was no longer seen as being the result of habit formation,

but rather of rule-governed behaviour (Chomsky 1957, 1965 and Neisser 1967, referred to in Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 4), this approach strongly favoured grammar and vocabulary instead of pronunciation teaching.

The prevalent assumption was that achieving native-like pronunciation was unrealistic and could never be attained. Thus, the advocates of the Cognitive Approach demanded a shift of emphasis towards teaching items that could be learnt more easily, e.g. grammatical structures and individual words. (Morley 1991: 483-484)

### **2.2.5 The 1970s: Silent Way and Community Language Teaching**

In Silent Way classes of the 1970s, learners did not receive any explicit analytic-linguistic instruction and did not have to learn a phonetic alphabet; however, the focus of Silent Way instruction was clearly on the sound system of the target language. From the start of such a class, the accuracy of sounds and structures was at the fore. The name of this approach derived from the teacher's role in class, who was expected to speak as little as possible and only indicate what the students should do by using gestures. In order for such teaching to be effective, special tools were used to convey the essence of pronunciation without offering specialised linguistic information, e.g. a sound-colour chart, word charts or colour rods. (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu 2010: 985)

Community Language Teaching considered a pronunciation teaching syllabus as having to be initiated and designed by the students themselves. Depending on the students' individual needs, they decided what to learn and practice. The teacher, sometimes also referred to as 'counsellor' in Community Language Teaching, was used as a resource for translating all the native-language utterances that the students wanted to be able to say in the target language. Once provided with the target-language utterance, the learners repeated it until they were able to say it fluently and eventually recorded it on tape. This recording was then played back to the students so they could match the target-language utterance with the word-for-word translation (chunks) that had been provided earlier by the counsellor. Clearly, Community Language Teaching follows the concept of an intuitive-imitative approach. (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu 2010: 985)

### **2.2.6 1970s/1980s until today: Communicative Approach**

A very influential idea that is still valid and used in foreign language teaching today is that of communicative language ability, the basis of the Communicative Approach. Hymes coined the term ‘communicative competence’ in the early 1970s and thereby shifted linguists’ emphasis away from a narrow focus on language; quite unlike Chomsky a few years earlier, who described ‘competence’ as what the speaker-hearer knows about the language, and distinguished it clearly from ‘performance’, i.e. actual language use. Hymes, himself a sociolinguist, was interested in the social and cultural component in communication. In his view, it is not enough to know how a language works, but what is necessary is socio-cultural knowledge – rules of use – to understand and effectively use linguistic forms. (Hedge 2000: 45)

However, pronunciation was also integrated into the concept of the Communicative Approach. The key components of a communicative syllabus are linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency. In this approach, pronunciation teaching is part of the linguistic competence component and intrinsically linked to vocabulary learning. Selecting an appropriate item of vocabulary, knowing how to spell, pronounce and form other words with it is regarded a key competence in foreign language learning and therefore an inevitable part of any communicative language teaching syllabus. According to Hedge (2000: 57), pronunciation teaching in a Communicative Approach curriculum needs to concentrate on the accurate pronunciation of linguistic forms and the use of stress, rhythm and intonation to express meaning.

Generally speaking, the ultimate aim of the Communicative Approach is communication, which is, of course, closely linked to fluency. Since intelligible pronunciation is vital in spoken interaction, pronunciation teaching was urged once again. It was maintained that there would be a threshold level of pronunciation for non-native speakers of a foreign language, below which they must not fall; otherwise this would result in serious communication problems. This, however, would happen irrespective of their lexical and grammatical proficiency. (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 7)

According to Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2010: 985), common pronunciation teaching techniques of the Communicative Approach are

- listening and imitating (as in Direct Method teaching),
- phonetic training (originating from the Reform Movement; may involve work with phonetic transcriptions),
- minimal pair drills (as in the Audiolingual Method or Oral Approach),
- contextualised minimal pairs (i.e. minimal pair drills placed within contexts that require students to respond with meaningful answers),
- visual aids (as in Silent Way teaching),
- tongue twisters,
- developmental approximation drills (i.e. a technique inspired by first language acquisition research that leads foreign language learners to acquire certain sounds before others),
- practice of vowel shifts,
- reading aloud,
- recording the learners' production.

Despite the fact that, in the early years of the Communicative Approach, pronunciation teaching was largely confined to the word level and most of the materials available were rejected on those grounds, the influence of discourse-based approaches meant that material developers and teachers were searching for more effective ways of teaching pronunciation for communicative contexts. The focus of pronunciation within communicative language teaching shifted towards suprasegmental features in discourse, which proved to be especially efficient when designing short-term pronunciation courses for non-natives. (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 10)

Today, however, Communicative-Approach pronunciation teaching strives for a balance in teaching segmentals and suprasegmentals. It has been accepted that distinguishing sounds that carry a high functional load, e.g. /i:/ in sheep and /ɪ/ in ship, is at least as important as being able to distinguish suprasegmental features such as intonation when, for example, asking a question. Pronunciation syllabi of communicative language teaching classes today try to integrate the most vital aspects of segmentals and suprasegmentals as well as voice quality setting, which also means familiarising the learners with the concept of 'accent' in a given language (e.g. pitch level, vowel space...). (Celce-Murica, Brinton & Goodwin 1996: 10; Derwing & Rossiter 2002: 156; Levis & Grant 2003: 14)

### **2.2.7 New directions in pronunciation teaching**

In the last few years, new approaches and methods in pronunciation teaching have been proposed by foreign language teachers and researchers (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu 2010: 985). They partly draw upon principles from the Communicative Approach and try to make use of advances in other academic fields. Examples would be drama and psychology, which emphasise the engagement of the learner in the activities and thereby aim to enhance the individual learning outcomes. The study of speech deficiencies in recent years has also changed the way professionals teach the pronunciation component in EFL. Findings from speech pathology suggest that fluency-building exercises and accuracy-orientated tasks are especially beneficial. Since learning involves a number of human senses, multi-sensory modes of instruction have become the vogue lately, as well as the use and alteration of authentic materials. In addition, information and communication technology has also provided EFL practitioners with instructional technology for productive use in a pronunciation teaching context.

This trend of using the latest technology is mentioned in Muir-Herzig (2004, referred to in Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu 2010: 985-986), who stresses the variety of equipment currently available and the countless applications in the language classroom. Word processing, computers and digital cameras have been part of modern foreign language teaching for quite some time; however, LCD panels, projectors of various kinds, video conferencing (so-called distance education), databases, website development, electronic references, instructional software, etc. are new to the field of foreign language learning and require adequate training on part of the teacher to make effective use of this technology.

In order for the use of technology in the classroom to be productive and successful, teachers need to accept the learners' becoming more active and independent. Computers, for instance, provide countless opportunities for collaborative student work, for finding alternative solutions to various problems, and using them in class may also encourage critical thinking on the part of the learners. Another example would be the furthering of skills such as gathering information, designing a virtual slideshow and presenting these findings to an audience, which can be achieved by integrating the World Wide Web and other digital media into foreign language teaching (Muir-Herzig 2004: 113-115). Without doubt, activities that



involve speaking and presentation skills prove particularly beneficial in terms of enhancing the learners' phonological competence.

### **2.2.8 Approaches disregarding pronunciation**

Among those approaches which did not put emphasis on or even completely disregarded pronunciation teaching is the famous Grammar-Translation Method of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Conventional wisdom in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that native-like pronunciation would be unattainable for a non-native, thus the pronunciation component did not receive much attention in foreign language teaching programmes of that time. In contrast to grammatical structures and language rules, oral communication and pronunciation in particular were clearly no areas of main concern in the Grammar-Translation Method. According to Morley (1991: 486), the speaking and pronunciation components were “viewed as meaningless non-communicative drill-and-exercise gambits”. Moreover, the effectiveness of classroom activities for the development of pronunciation proficiency was questioned in general. Purcell & Suter (1980: 271-287, quoted in Hismanoglu 2006: 103) state that many studies showed

that little relationship exists between teaching pronunciation in the classroom and attained proficiency in pronunciation; the strongest factors found to affect pronunciation (i.e. native language and motivation) seem to have little to do with classroom activities.

The emergence of communicative language teaching and its focus on real communication put this rather extreme viewpoint into perspective again. In foreign language classrooms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a complete disregard of pronunciation does not withstand current findings of language acquisition research.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Cognitive Approach and early stages of the Communicative Approach did not elevate pronunciation to a pinnacle of importance. Neither did Total Physical Response, which allowed learners to begin speaking a foreign language only when they were ready for it. This method expected students to make mistakes in the initial phase of acquiring speaking skills. Hence, teachers were quite lenient and readily tolerated mistakes. This, of course, may also be interpreted as de-emphasising the role of pronunciation within the framework of foreign language learning. (Levis 2005: 369)

Another movement that did not favour pronunciation teaching throughout the whole of its programme was Krashen and Terrell's Natural Approach. The primary focus of the first acquisition stages of this approach was listening abilities. One aim was for the learners to internalise the sound system of the foreign language in question, but at the same time they were deprived of the chance to practice their speaking and pronunciation skills right from the start. In the light of several studies revealing that productive pronunciation teaching must go beyond habit formation and take cognitive development, linguistic universals as well as psychological and sociological conditions into account, designing a pronunciation curriculum based on the Natural Approach seems more than questionable (Jones 1997: 103). In order to get an impression of how relevant pronunciation and pronunciation teaching are for learners of English as a foreign language today, the following chapter will present a number of different views of the relevance of pronunciation within TEFL.

### **3. The relevance of pronunciation for EFL learners**

#### **3.1 Pronunciation and language competence**

“Pronunciation is never an end to itself but a means to negotiate meaning in discourse [...]” – that is what Dalton and Seidlhofer maintain in the introduction to their seminal work *Pronunciation* (1994: ix). The quote makes clear what purpose pronunciation actually serves: It carries meaning and is therefore an invaluable part of language proficiency. Anyone incapable of articulating certain words correctly is prone to be misunderstood, which means they cannot convey whatever message they originally intended to communicate. Learning a foreign language usually involves learning how to pronounce sounds and words correctly in order to be accepted as a partner in any kind of communicative interaction. Thus, it seems logical to make pronunciation an integral component of any EFL curriculum.

As regards the place of pronunciation within overall language ability, Hedge (2000) maintains that phonological skills are part of one of the five sub-competences of language (Canale and Swain 1980; Faerch, Haastrup & Phillipson 1984; Bachmann 1990, all referred

to in Hedge 2000: 46): linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and fluency. This model provides teachers with five different areas of language proficiency which they need to consider when developing curricula or designing tasks for classroom use. In the context of phonological instruction, linguistic competence is particularly important, however, the other four sub-skills must not be disregarded. In fact, pragmatic and strategic competence, as well as fluency, are at least in part dependent upon pronunciation, since successful communication requires the message to be properly coded and decoded by the sender and the recipient. If this cannot be done adequately, e.g. because the message is unintelligibly pronounced (i.e. coded), communication inevitably fails. The following paragraphs will introduce Hedge's concept of communicative language ability by describing its four underlying competences:

First, pragmatic competence is concerned with the ability to perform a particular function or clearly express an intention in a way that is appropriate to the social context. Discourse competence, on the other hand, means the knowledge of performing turns in discourse, maintaining the conversation and developing the topic. Canale and Swain (1980: 25, quoted in Hedge 2000: 52) define the third sub-skill, strategic competence, as "how to cope in an authentic communicative situation and how to keep the communicative channel open", which can therefore be described as involving the use of communication strategies. Finally, fluency is "the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness, or undue hesitation" (Hedge 2000: 54).

Linguistic competence is concerned with knowledge of the language itself, its form and meaning – it thus involves a command of the rules of spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, word formation, grammatical structure, sentence structure, and linguistic semantics. Teachers need to be aware of the fact that linguistic competence is an integral part of communicative competence, which is also pointed out by Faerch, Haastrup & Phillipson (1984: 168, quoted in Hedge 2000: 47):

It is impossible to conceive of a person being communicatively competent without being linguistically competent.

As can be inferred from the definition of linguistic competence above, pronunciation and phonological knowledge are important aspects of a general and wider communicative competence. Regarding the misconception that formal correctness is not an aim in classrooms where this model of communicative competence is sought, it must be said that the correct use

of rules is nevertheless the ultimate goal, but being tolerant of risk-taking and errors at the same time is not a conceptual contradiction. This, of course, applies particularly to pronunciation, where the manner in which corrective feedback is given influences learner motivation and their readiness to speak and contribute to class discussions. Generally, errors and mistakes need to be seen as part of the process of achieving communicative competence. (Hedge 2000: 47)

Hedge also emphasises the significant implications of this model of communicative language ability for teaching and learning in the foreign language classroom. In her view, the insights gained into linguistic competence must imply the following goals for language learners (Hedge 2000: 56):

- to achieve accuracy in the grammatical forms of the language
- to pronounce the forms accurately
- to use stress, rhythm, and intonation to express meaning
- to build a range of vocabulary
- to learn the script and spelling rules
- to achieve accuracy in syntax and word formation

It is evident from this list that pronunciation, even ranking second and third respectively, is a relevant area of language teaching that must be part of any foreign language curriculum. The extent in which pronunciation teaching should be included in syllabi for language courses is not explicitly stated by Hedge and her colleagues. However, one could infer from the explanations above that pronunciation is seen as having priority over other aspects of linguistic competence. This notion, which is said to have been accompanied by “a resurgence and growth in interest in research on the acquisition of a second language (L2) sound system”, is also confirmed by Hansen Edwards & Zampini (2008: 1-6) in their work *Phonology and second language acquisition*.

### **3.1.1 ‘Phonological competence’ and the CEFR**

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, acknowledges the vital role of pronunciation within a general foreign language competence. In their description of phonological competence, the authors use technical linguistic terminology to define the

necessary knowledge and skills for the perception and production of sounds. According to the CEFR, the following features are of particular importance (Council of Europe 2001: 116-117):

- the sound-units (*phonemes*) of the language and their realisation in particular contexts (*allophones*);
- the phonetic features which distinguish phonemes (*distinctive features*, e.g. voicing, rounding, nasality, plosion);
- the phonetic composition of words (*syllable structure*, the sequence of phonemes, word stress, word tones);
- sentence phonetics (*prosody*)
  - sentence stress and rhythm
  - intonation;
- phonetic reduction
  - vowel reduction
  - strong and weak forms
  - assimilation
  - elision.

The description of phonological competence in the official Council of Europe document in combination with the list above clearly indicates what manifold demands are made on learners when acquiring the phonological system of any foreign language. However, the features listed above are not ordered according to priority or extent of required attainment. Rather, they are a concise inventory of general pronunciation components that form an essential part of overall foreign language competence.

Phonological competence can also be assessed according to the competence levels of the CEFR (A1 to C2). In order to offer teachers and learners a clearly structured table for reference, the Council of Europe has devised a scale for ‘phonological control’ that can be used for measuring the degree of phonological mastery, and it relates to the six levels of competence (Council of Europe 2001: 117):

	<b>PHONOLOGICAL CONTROL</b>
<b>C2</b>	<i>As C1</i>
<b>C1</b>	<i>Can vary intonation and place sentence stress correctly in order to express finer shades of meaning.</i>
<b>B2</b>	<i>Has acquired a clear, natural pronunciation and intonation.</i>
<b>B1</b>	<i>Pronunciation is clearly intelligible even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur.</i>
<b>A2</b>	<i>Pronunciation is generally clear enough to be understood despite a noticeable foreign accent, but conversational partners will need to ask for repetition from time to time.</i>
<b>A1</b>	<i>Pronunciation of a very limited repertoire of learnt words and phrases can be understood with some effort by native speakers used to dealing with speakers of his/her language group.</i>

The descriptors presented above seem linguistically vague (‘intelligible’, ‘clear enough’, etc.) and do not use terminology that has been established in the field of phonetics and phonological instruction. Rather, users of the CEFR are confronted with commonplace expressions which might be heard in conversations and discussions about spoken language production by non-experts. Even though the CEFR descriptors must be able to be applied to all European languages, this cannot be seen as a reason for linguistic imprecision. In order to assess the competence levels of the pronunciation component of speaking performances in a linguistically more adequate way, a more detailed framework featuring descriptors which also include some of the points listed earlier (Council of Europe 2001: 116-117) would certainly be needed.

In addition, the CEFR does not explicitly state the role of pronunciation within a specified curriculum or how the progression of attainment of certain features may be organised. In the concluding remarks of the chapter on ‘phonological competence’ (Council of Europe 2001: 117), the authors advise users of the CEFR to consider and state

- what new phonological skills are required of the learner;
- what is the relative importance of sounds and prosody;
- whether phonetic accuracy and fluency are an early learning objective or developed as a longer term objective.

Apparently, this list is concerned with the design and development of a foreign language or pronunciation curriculum. Since the scale for ‘phonological control’ and the list of elements of phonological competence do not present teachers with an ideal progression within pronunciation syllabi, these final remarks insinuate that foreign language practitioners need to decide for themselves what aspects of pronunciation to develop at what stage of the course

(i.e. progression) and what features of phonological competence to foreground. The position of scholars currently doing research in the fields of phonology and pronunciation teaching will be discussed in the following sub-chapters.

### **3.1.2 Assessment of pronunciation**

Similar to the CEFR, scales for the assessment of spoken and written production are usually based on different definitions of language competence, i.e. a more or less detailed description of the various components that are constitutive of a competence model. Examples for such assessment scales are the ‘Assessment Scales for Speaking’, devised by the working group of Lower Austrian English teachers. Two scales seem particularly interesting as regards the role of pronunciation: the ‘Assessment Scale for Spoken Production: Years 5 to 8’ and the ‘Assessment Scale for Speaking’, which has been developed as a teacher’s guideline for grading student performances in the oral part of the ‘Matura’ (i.e. the Austrian upper-secondary school-leaving examination). It has to be noted, though, that the scales introduced in the following are based on the ‘Matura’ specifications that are valid until the academic year 2014/2015, which is when the new, standardised school-leaving exam will be introduced. This will bring a number of changes in the examination format (e.g. students will be required to discuss a certain issue or problem with a partner as well as take a so-called ‘individual long turn’), which means new assessment scales will have to be used. Such scales are currently being developed (BMUKK 2011: 20).

The following criteria need to be assessed when using the scale for years 5 to 8 (upper-secondary) to grade oral student performance (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Anglisten Niederösterreichs 2005):

- Task achievement, communicative effectiveness, organisation
- Fluency, intonation, pronunciation
- Appropriacy, range, register
- Accuracy of vocabulary and spoken English grammar

Each of these categories may be awarded up to five points, which gives a maximum total of 20 points. Explicit descriptors are used for bands 1, 3 and 5, whereas bands 2 and 4 are defined as rendering “[s]ome features of 3 [or 5] and some features of 1 [or 3] in approximately equal measure” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Anglisten Niederösterreichs 2005).

As can be seen from the list above, pronunciation is mentioned as a criterion that constitutes a good performance in spoken foreign language interaction. An excellent performance (band 5) features a

- very good to good flow of language;
- pronunciation is of a consistently high level, consistent phonological control, meaning never obscured;
- pausing and hesitation sound natural;
- good control of stress and intonation,

whereas poor performances (band 1) are characterised by

- speech that is very disconnected and difficult to follow, frequent repetitions necessary to maintain communication;
- phonological inaccuracies make comprehension difficult;
- insufficient stress and intonation.

This clearly shows that pronunciation and phonological features have an impact on the grades of the learners and must therefore play a vital role within the general foreign language curriculum. Thus, the relevance of phonology and pronunciation for learners is – at least according to this scale – undisputed. The same applies to the 5-band scale used for the oral ‘Matura’ exam. Here, however, pronunciation is one of five categories and is not combined with fluency or intonation. Nevertheless, it appears as if the criterion of ‘pronunciation’ also includes suprasegmental features, e.g. stress or intonation. The individual bands are defined as follows (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Anglisten Niederösterreichs 2006: 12):

<b>BAND</b>	<b>PRONUNCIATION</b>
<b>5</b>	Pronunciation is of a consistently high level; little L1 accent.
<b>4</b>	Pronunciation is of a high level; L1 accent may be evident, but does not affect the clarity of the message.
<b>3</b>	Pronunciation is generally clear; L1 accent may be evident, and sometimes affects the clarity of the message.
<b>2</b>	Pronunciation is generally intelligible, but L1 features may put a strain on the listener.
<b>1</b>	Hard to understand, student must repeat frequently in order to be understood, even by a sympathetic listener.
<b>0</b>	Sample of language inadequate to gain even the lowest mark.

Clear descriptions as in the table above show learners what is expected of them and are at the same time an important help and guideline for teachers and examiners when preparing for and assessing oral performances in high-stakes examinations such as the ‘Matura’. It is to be hoped that the holistic and analytic scales that are currently being developed for the new,



standardised school-leaving exam are similarly explicit in their descriptions of phonological competence levels.

Both the CEFR and the assessment scales devised by the working group of Lower Austrian English teachers illustrate that in school contexts, pronunciation and phonological competence are considered essential features of foreign language competence. However, in other contexts, it may be reasonable to reconsider the role of pronunciation, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **3.2 Pronunciation and the ELF debate**

The term ‘English as a lingua franca’ (usually abbreviated to ELF) has been used to refer to communication between non-native speakers of English for several years now. The following chapter will try to present a history of this phenomenon and the term as such, and will further investigate its relevance in various teaching and school contexts.

### **3.2.1 Definition: English as a lingua franca**

Since only one out of every four speakers of English is a native speaker of the language (Crystal 2003, referred to in Seidlhofer 2005: 339), the logical conclusion would be to assume that an overwhelming majority of the communication in English is carried out by speakers of first languages other than English. Although this does not mean that native speakers of English do not participate in ELF interactions, what is special about ELF is that in most cases it is used as

a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication.  
(Firth 1996: 240, quoted in Seidlhofer 2005: 339)

Another frequently quoted definition of ‘English as a lingua franca’ was provided by House (1999: 74, quoted in Seidlhofer 2004: 211):

ELF interactions are defined as interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue.

Other terms that are commonly used for this or similar language phenomena are ‘English as an international language’ (EIL), ‘World Englishes’, ‘English as a global language’, ‘English as a world language’ and ‘World English’. Some of these expressions may be misleading in that they suggest that there is only one clearly distinguishable, codified, and unitary variety of English used among non-natives (Seidlhofer 2004: 210). This is, however, certainly not the case, which is why ‘English as a lingua franca’ is the preferred term when English is chosen as medium of communication across linguacultural boundaries between people from different L1 backgrounds (House 1999 and Seidlhofer 2001, referred to in Seidlhofer 2005: 339).

Native speakers of English still tend to be seen as custodians over what is correct or acceptable usage of the language. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that English today is “being shaped [...] at least as much by its non-native speakers as its native speakers” (Seidlhofer 2004: 211). Academic research of certain ELF features has been under way for almost two centuries now. Most prominently, phonology, pragmatics and lexicogrammar have been intensively investigated. With the help of ELF corpora, it has become easier for linguists to analyse and describe specific aspects of ELF. One of these corpora, VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English, <http://voice.univie.ac.at>), has been compiled at the University of Vienna.

### **3.2.2 The ‘Lingua Franca Core’**

The ‘Lingua Franca Core’ (LFC), a collection of phonological forms that are allegedly both internationally intelligible and acceptable in ELF communication, draws upon the findings of an empirical study by Jenkins in which interactions between L2-speakers of English were analysed (Seidlhofer 2004: 216). Acceptability in this context, however, does no longer refer to forms uttered by non-native speakers being acceptable for native hearers, but rather to acceptability of forms among non-natives (Jenkins 2000: 124). The LFC is based on language data collected from instances of communication among English L2-speakers with a wide range of L1 backgrounds. In order to establish her ‘Lingua Franca Core’, Jenkins used a variety of methods, including field observation and recordings.

However, much earlier than Jenkins, Jenner (1989: 2, quoted in Jenkins 2000: 125) advocated the need

to establish what *all* native speakers of *all* varieties have in common which enables them to communicate effectively with native speakers of varieties other than their own.

Thus, Jenner conceived a core which was primarily motivated by his intention to provide a list of priorities in pronunciation instruction for non-native learners of English, which would ensure intelligibility and acceptability anywhere in the world. The following priorities were included in his list (Jenner 1989: 4, quoted in Jenkins 2000: 125-126):

- 1 The consonantal inventory.
- 2 Vowel quantity: i.e. long and short.
- 3 Syllabic structure: i.e. closed with clusters.
- 4 Syllabic values: strong, weak, reduced.
- 5 Rhythmic patterning: 'stress-timing'.
- 6 Prominence and tonicity: i.e. location of pitch features.
- 7 Tones: *some* binary opposition, such as fall vs. fall-rise.
- 8 Articulatory setting: laxity and lack of movement.
- 9 Vowel quality: all vowels should be drawled. The details of shape then follow.
- 10 Pitch levels: high, mid and low.
- (11 Voice quality, if the learner's native habits are disturbingly different from those of native varieties of English.)

Jenner's core was subsequently developed further to take into account the elusiveness of the term 'intelligibility' and the relativity of his understanding that only a native speaker can be the producer and receiver of intelligible pronunciation (Jenkins 2000: 126). Jenkins built on Jenner's work, changed it fundamentally and, after intensive analysis and investigation of the available ELF data, presented her own 'Lingua Franca Core'. She identified a number of pronunciation 'errors' which caused intelligibility problems in conversations between non-native speakers of English. Those were then incorporated into the LFC, whereas those which did not lead to comprehension issues were considered as non-core ELF features. The LFC thus includes the following core areas (Seidlhofer 2004: 216):

- The consonant inventory with the exception of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, and of dark 'l' [ɫ], none of which caused any intelligibility problems in the lingua franca data.
- Additional phonetic requirements: aspiration of word-initial voiceless stops /p/, /t/, and /k/, which were otherwise frequently heard as their lenis counterparts /b/, /d/, and /g/; and shortening of vowel sounds before fortis consonants, and the maintenance of length before lenis

consonants, e.g., the shorter /æ/ in the word *sat* as contrasted with the phonetically longer /æ/ in the word *sad*.

- Consonant clusters: no omission of sounds in word-initial clusters, e.g. in *proper* and *strap*; omission of sounds in word-medial and word-final clusters only permissible according to L1 English rules of syllable structure so that, for example, the word *friendship* can become /frenʃɪp/ but not /frendɪp/ or /fredʃɪp/.
- Vowel sounds: maintenance of the contrast between long and short vowels, such as the /ɪ/ and /i:/ in the words *live* and *leave*; L2 regional vowel qualities otherwise intelligible provided they are used consistently, with the exception of the substitution of the sound /ɜ:/ especially with /ɑ:/.
- Production and placement of nuclear (tonic) stress, especially when used contrastively (e.g., He came by TRAIN vs. He CAME by train).

In addition, various substitutions of sounds proved not to be crucial for mutual intelligibility, e.g. /f, v/ or /s, z/ or /t, d/ for /θ, ð/. Since substitutions like these can also be found in some native-speaker varieties of English, the sounds /θ/, /ð/, and also [t] are deemed non-core ELF features. Furthermore, vowel quality, weak forms, assimilation (and any other form of connected speech), pitch direction (to signal attitude or grammatical meaning), word stress placement, and stress timing are also described as being non-core. (Seidlhofer 2004: 217)

These seemingly innovative findings naturally give rise to the question why, what or whether at all the LFC should be taught in the English classroom. The insights into ELF that have been gained could potentially change pronunciation teaching or foreign language teaching in general. However, it is clear that forms of ELF have already existed when there was no or only little interest on the part of scholars and academics. In light of this, Jenkins's LFC might be seen as a collection of linguistic data rather than as an innovation in foreign-language instruction, and basing foreign-language teaching in school contexts on the LFC and such a vague notion as 'intelligibility' appears both bold and risky. Whether there is a future for the LFC in modern-day English teaching nonetheless will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-chapter.

### 3.2.3 Teaching the 'Lingua Franca Core'

Naturally, Jenkins (2000: 195) advocates a radical change in pronunciation teaching principles. In her view, the use of a phonological core, the 'Lingua Franca Core', is necessary

in pronunciation instruction in order to accommodate current international needs of learners of English. The sociolinguistic factors and implications of using English as a lingua franca shape Jenkins's approach to pronunciation teaching, which is based on the belief that in an increasingly globalised world, teachers and material writers must adapt their position and attitude towards meeting the needs of their learners.

Jenkins (2000: 195-196) justifies her endorsement of ELF phonological instruction by emphasising that making use of native-speaker models in English language teaching is an anachronism due to the fact that only a minority of English users are L1 speakers of English. Moreover, she criticises current teaching practices and the quality of published materials in the field of pronunciation, as they are still orientated towards native-speaker models. She calls for an urgent paradigm shift in pronunciation teaching that is supposed to end traditional presuppositions and ethnocentric approaches. Jenkins's arguments for the integration of ELF and the LFC into the mainstream TEFL curriculum are supported by a number of linguists in the field of English as an International Language (EIL), such as McKay (2002) or Matsuda & Friedrich (2011), who also provide pedagogical ideas and suggestions how to teach the various components of ELF.

While many of the points raised by Jenkins cannot be denied, e.g. the orientation of materials towards native L1 models, the question that needs to be asked in connection with this is what the alternative would be. Undoubtedly, teaching materials must take the fact into account that the majority of English speakers are non-natives, for example by including listening comprehension activities featuring non-native English speakers that aim at mutual understanding in ELF contexts. However, having no native-speaker models means removing invaluable sources of correction, whose absence would most probably cause ELF to change even quicker, more radically than now, and in an uncontrolled way. Without any L1 models, there would be no original foundation of any lingua franca, which, in consequence, means that ELF rules would have no real origin and it would therefore be impossible to state where and from what the language system differs. As stated above, this would also imply a potentially continuous major and rapid language change. Surely, this cannot be the aim of advocates of ELF teaching and teaching the LFC in particular. In contrast to the phonology of ELF, the phonetics and phonology of the standard varieties of English are well researched and established, which enables educators to teach standard pronunciations more easily and probably also more successfully. Additionally, sociolinguistic arguments such as expectations

by students, parents and other stakeholders in education clearly contradict the teaching of the LFC.

A number of scholars reject Jenkins's promotion of ELF phonology, e.g. Ketabi & Shomoossi (2007: 174-176), who criticise the destruction and minimalisation of English. Kuo (2006: 220) even states that the native-speaker model might be controversial, but "it is more appropriate and appealing in second language pedagogy than the description of English which is somewhat reduced and incomplete". Trudgill (2008: 94) seriously doubts Jenkins's claims and even ridicules them by saying that according to her, he would have to "relearn how to pronounce [his] own language efficiently" in order to be understood by non-native speakers of English. Similar to the author of the thesis at hand, Scheuer (2008: 127) emphasises the need for native speakers as "the keepers of the key to what is irritating and what is acceptable". Moreover, she finds Jenkins's line of argumentation faulty (Scheuer 2008: 114): At times, Jenkins maintains that certain LFC elements are included because "many L1 speakers of English use them" (Jenkins 2000: 138), but only a few pages later, she argues that actual native-speaker language use cannot be "a valid argument for EIL" (Jenkins 2000: 147). The fact that ELF and the LFC are only collections of empirical language data is strongly opposed by Sobkowiak (2008: 131-150), who believes that teaching goals must also be based on other, e.g. non-empirical, norms. In addition, he rejects the implications for the teaching of vocabulary, grammar and spelling, which will lead to a fall in EFL teaching standards.

Another argument against teaching the phonological 'Lingua Franca Core', albeit a seemingly less scholarly one, is the aestheticism of English native-speaker accents. Kachru (1992: 362, quoted in Jenkins 2000: 196) states that L1 accents represent the corresponding foreign cultures, which he views as a particularly negative feature of native-speaker pronunciation. However, by maintaining that native English accents carry an ethnocentric load and promote monolithic cultures, Kachru concentrates solely on the sociolinguistic aspects of language use and pronunciation. This exclusive focus on ethnic and cultural implications foregrounds only these facets of language but ignores others, which does not render Kachru's view convincing. Nevertheless, it needs to be said that these are indeed essential components of any language which must not be disregarded in linguistic analyses. In fact, the notion of 'accent' incorporates much more than only sociolinguistic factors – the beauty of language and of native pronunciations is another key feature. In light of this, it does not appear unreasonable to advocate the promotion and teaching of English L1 accents in the

ELT classroom. Equalling sociocultural identification to the aspiration to native-speaker pronunciation might also be evaluated positively when teaching L1 accents. Foreign cultures and actual native-speaker accents provide students with an additional opportunity to realise that what is being taught and learnt exists in reality, and is not merely a hypothetical model (as it is the case with the LFC). It has always been an asset of TEFL that students could relate the subject matter directly to what is being said, written or done in the world outside school – very much unlike advanced maths, physics or other natural sciences, whose relevance must often be specially explained to the learners. Using ELF and the LFC, which are both eventually linguistic models that are based on collected data from empirical studies on non-native-speaker language use, to improve English language teaching in the future must therefore be seriously be questioned.

An additional point is raised by Widdowson in his work *Defining issues in English language teaching*. He states that descriptive accounts of ELF cannot or should not determine what is taught. The combination of considerations about the global role of English with a critical evaluation of the pedagogic relevance of linguistic description is a central theme in Widdowson's book. According to him, "linguistic descriptions cannot automatically meet pedagogic requirement," which means that it would therefore be wrong to assume that "findings should directly and uniquely inform what is included in language courses" (Widdowson 2003: 106, quoted in Seidlhofer 2004: 225). Thus, descriptive facts need not necessarily be transferred immediately and completely to language pedagogy and ELT pedagogical practice.

Although the inclusion of ELF and ELF features in the mainstream ELT curriculum is undoubtedly necessary, the theoretical foundation and reasoning of teaching LFC pronunciation may be called into question. However, for short-term ELT courses, e.g. for businesspeople, teaching and actively using the LFC would surely be feasible.

## **4. Priorities in pronunciation teaching**

Over the years, pronunciation and phonological instruction were attributed various degrees of importance. Parallel with these changes, the priorities in pronunciation teaching have also been altered. This chapter will centre on previous as well as current and possible future priorities in the pronunciation component of English foreign language teaching.

### **4.1 Past priorities**

At the very beginning of foreign language instruction, competence in writing was of utmost importance for teachers and learners. This was the case until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when the focus of ELT shifted towards a general communicative competence, of which reasonable pronunciation skills are seen by some as essential basics for successful oral communication. (Pfandl-Buchegger & Landsiedler 2007: 245)

As already mentioned in chapter two, many traditional approaches to foreign language teaching viewed pronunciation as a minor matter or as irrelevant altogether. The Grammar-Translation Method and reading-based approaches did not concentrate on pronunciation at all, whereas in Direct Method instruction, it received considerable attention. However, the methodology was primitive: Teachers were native or near-native speakers who presented pronunciation inductively and rectified learner mistakes by modelling correct language use. Audiolingual instruction put significant emphasis on pronunciation, but still used traditional methods such as minimal pairs, drills, and short conversations. (Celce-Murcia & Goodwin 1991: 136, referred to in Hismanoglu 2006: 102-103)

Both the Audiolingual Method, which was developed in the US, and Situational Language Teaching, originating from the UK, focused on correct grammar – and accuracy of pronunciation was another high-priority goal in each system. Language was seen as consisting of hierarchies of structurally related items for encoding meaning, and therefore rules of combining phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases and sentences were taught. Regarding phonological instruction, Morley (1991: 484-485) states that



The pronunciation class in this view was one that gave primary attention to phonemes and their meaningful contrasts, environmental allophonic variations, and combinatory phonotactic rules, along with structurally based attention to stress, rhythm, and intonation.

Popular methods in audiolingual or situational teaching were, among others, articulatory explanations, imitation, and memorisation of patterns through drills and dialogues with extensive correction (Morley 1991: 485). The use of the past tense in this and the previous paragraph may be misleading, since language instruction in many parts of the world is still based on the theories of the Audiolingual Method or Situational Language Teaching. However, with the findings of contemporary applied linguistics in mind, these two approaches, together with their instructional methods, can be seen as obsolete.

Rising doubt about the teachability of pronunciation was accompanied by a substantial decrease in the publication of teaching materials on pronunciation and in the interest and attention to phonological instruction in general. Many of the principles and practices of the traditional approaches were questioned, which was caused by the development of new models of second language learning, by changing foci in second language teaching, and by changing models of linguistic description. Novel pedagogical insights rendered familiar methodologies inappropriate – priorities shifted towards language functions, communicative competences, task-based methodologies as well as realism and authenticity in learning materials and activities. Until then, pronunciation exercises were almost exclusively meaningless, non-communicative drill-and-exercise gambits. (Morley 1991: 485-486)

In the 1970s, a number of influential articles and books were published, which continued to be relevant for teaching practices and the development of new methodologies throughout the 1980s. The following topics and issues were addressed in those works (Morley 1991: 486):

- basic philosophical considerations for teaching pronunciation
- the importance of meaning and contextualised practice
- learner involvement, self-monitoring, and learners' feelings
- learner cognitive involvement
- intelligibility issues
- variability issues
- correction issues
- increasing attention to stress, rhythm, intonation, reductions, assimilations, etc.

- expanded perspectives on listening/pronunciation focus
- attention to the sound-spelling link

This shift of priorities in the 1970s and 1980s was crucial with regard to current points of discussion in the applied linguistics and language pedagogy discourse communities. Many, if not all, of the aspects mentioned above are still considered vital in pronunciation teaching practice today. The 1980s and 1990s, however, saw yet another change of focus.

In the mid-1980s and continuing until the 1990s, academic interest in revisiting phonological instruction for adults and young adults was growing again. This was partly due to pronunciation developments in several ESP (English for Specific Purposes) areas, such as academic or occupational English (Morley 1991: 487). Researchers investigated what the special needs of learners in these professional fields were and then made suggestions how to improve pronunciation teaching for specific target learner groups. With the advent of Communicative Language Teaching, the communication aspect of pronunciation was emphasised once again, which was meant to put an end to drill exercises, whose ultimate purposes and goals have remained doubtful since their first use in the language classroom.

Many of the works published in the 1980s revealed important developments in pronunciation teaching as well as a number of questions that still occupied the research community. Morley (1991: 488) identified a new tendency in foreign language instruction, which gave rise to more extensive teaching sequences being dedicated to pronunciation and phonology:

An especially significant trend is an increasing number of programs engaged in developing new looks in pronunciation teaching, ones that are concerned with an expanded pronunciation/speech/oral communication component of the ESL curriculum.

Overall, with today's renewed professional commitment to empowering students to become effective, fully participating members of the English-speaking community in which they communicate, it is clear that there is a persistent, if small, groundswell of movement to write pronunciation back into the instructional equation [...].

According to Morley (1991: 488), this new perspective on phonological instruction had one new basic premise: In order to communicate effectively and in order to be seen as communicatively competent, intelligible pronunciation is required. From the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards, intelligibility was therefore viewed as an essential component of

communicative competence. Since Morley's understanding of intelligibility at that time was almost identical to today's concept of acceptability in ELF contexts, his mentioning of the term could be seen as a sign of an emerging linguistic interest in ELF.

## **4.2 Present priorities**

The importance of pronunciation for TEFL has been determined for a long time by ideology and intuition rather than research. Currently, it seems that the pronunciation component in ELT should neither be elevated to the central skill in language learning nor deemed entirely irrelevant. Research on pronunciation teaching practices has shown that a considerable number of teachers decide intuitively which features have the greatest effect on clarity and which can be learnt and taught in a classroom setting (Levis 2005: 369). Derwing & Munro (2005: 380) have noticed this tendency of teachers determining classroom priorities by relying on their intuition: "[I]nstructional materials and practices are still heavily influenced by commonsense intuitive notions", which might be problematic, since intuitions "cannot resolve many of the critical questions that face classroom instructors".

Levis (2005: 369) states that during the past 25 years, the teaching of suprasegmental rather than segmental features of pronunciation was favoured by teachers, although research evidence was very scarce. However, more recent, carefully designed studies showed that there is indeed some support for the superior role of suprasegmentals in phonological instruction. In addition, latest software developments and the wide availability of computer programmes make the discourse functions of suprasegmentals more accessible to learners and teachers, which further encourages work on those features (Levis & Chun 2005 and Pickering 2005, referred to in Levis 2005: 369).

Nevertheless, the role of suprasegmentals in ELF or EIL (English as an International Language) is still disputed. Some researchers doubt that all suprasegmentals are equally learnable, thus questioning their importance in ELF contexts. Pennington & Ellis (2000, referred to in Levis 2005: 369-370), for instance, found that some aspects of intonation, such as nuclear stress, seem to be learnable, though other elements, e.g. pitch movement marking boundaries or intonation of sentence tags, are not. As a consequence, Levis (2005: 370)

argues “a more nuanced approach is clearly needed” for those who are ardent supporters of the claim that suprasegmentals are essential features of English pronunciation. A similar position is held by Moedjito (2008: 138), who, after having conducted a study on practices and priorities in Indonesian educational settings, argues for a balance of segmental and suprasegmental features. Moedjito also found that the use of a variety of teaching techniques is seen as both motivating and effective, which is in line with research findings by other applied linguists, e.g. Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin (1996) and Dalton & Seidlhofer (1994).

In traditional approaches to pronunciation teaching, there is a clear focus on language segments, i.e. segmental features, rather than on prosodic patterns, i.e. suprasegmental features. More emphasis is placed on producing and discriminating individual sounds, whereas patterns of sound modification in longer stretches of speech (words and utterances, and the combined effects of stress, language rhythm, connected speech processes, prominence and intonation patterns) are seen as less important. This notion originated in early but not insignificant descriptions and explanations on sound articulation and acoustics, and is further supported by a number of conservative studies conducted on L1 and L2 phonetic and phonological systems. In connection with this, it does not appear surprising that many teachers are more readily prepared to teach segmentals rather than suprasegmental features, which is due to the fact that they are traditionally more aware of differences between the L1 and the L2 on segmental but not necessarily on suprasegmental level. (Busà 2007: 168-169)

As regards the teaching of suprasegmentals, it is clear that prosodic features of language represent a basic step in L1 acquisition; however, L2 learners appear to have considerable difficulty acquiring them. According to Busà (2007: 168), a number of reasons can be identified for this belief:

In general, while speakers are usually able to use and interpret prosody successfully in their everyday communication, they may have no awareness of prosodic patterns in speech, and may have difficulties hearing, recognizing or labeling different prosodic patterns, such as segmental durations, rhythmic or intonation patterns (i.e., rising vs. falling intonation, rising-falling vs. falling-rising intonation, etc.). Prosodic phenomena are difficult even for native speakers to describe and analyze (Bradford 1992: 1) and to agree on (Brazil 1994: 6).

In addition, traditional in-class explanations by the teacher, methods and materials may be inadequate, since those usually do not focus on the differences between L1 and L2 prosodic

systems to facilitate comprehension. It would therefore be more effective to prioritise prosody over other phonological features in pronunciation methodology, e.g. use prosodic elements instead of words for drills discriminating minimal pairs. Suprasegmentals are difficult to acquire because the perception and making sense of prosodic patterns in any L2 is an intricate matter. Busà (2007: 168) hence calls for new methods or applications that enhance students' comprehension and perception of L2 prosodic features.

Another reason why suprasegmental features still receive only little attention in some approaches to pronunciation teaching is due to the fact that linguistics has so far not attained full understanding of language prosody. Research on suprasegmentals is complex, since it requires investigations of physical (i.e. acoustic, articulatory, perceptual) properties as well as communicative functions. Moreover, prosodic meaning depends on personal, social and contextual factors, which makes it an inherently elusive language dimension. Busà (2007: 169) therefore concludes that learners need to be provided with clear explanations of the rules governing L2 prosodic patterns; otherwise they may be unable to make useful generalisations or comparisons with native-language patterns. This view is also supported by Spaai & Hermes (1993, referred to in Busà 2007: 169), who even formulated a caveat for teachers that prosody should not be taught implicitly.

When trying to determine appropriate foci in pronunciation teaching, it can be noticed that only few studies assess the usefulness of phonological instruction. Generally, there appears to be general acknowledgement that many foreign language learners need their teachers' help to improve intelligibility (Derwing & Munro 2005: 387). Interestingly, there is some evidence suggesting that pronunciation acquisition is no different from acquiring syntax. The similarity is that students need support in order to notice what they are doing. Consequently, the explicit teaching of phonology, which has long been denounced by some strands of ELT research, must not be disapproved of. Derwing & Munro (2005: 387-388), after having investigated a large number of studies on pronunciation teaching, maintain the following:

Just as students learning certain grammar points benefit from being explicitly instructed (Spada, 1997) to notice the difference between their own productions and those of L1 speakers (Schmidt, 1990), so students learning L2 pronunciation benefit from being explicitly taught phonological form to help them notice the differences between their own productions and those of proficient speakers in the L2 community.

As with almost every component of ELT, pronunciation teaching and the respective curriculum should be tailored to the learners' needs. A subject that is addressed frequently by researchers is the relationship between production and perception, since many studies have shown that problems with foreign language production stem from issues with perception. In order to support students effectively, a shift of focus towards perceptual training is required. Evidence from ELT research suggests that such training can indeed lead to automatic improvement in foreign language production. Teachers' intuitive practice of using perceptual training tasks such as discrimination and identification exercises is thus supported by empirical findings (Gilbert 1993, referred to in Derwing & Munro 2005: 388).

Two competing, if not contradictory, ideologies in pronunciation teaching have been debated by linguists and ELT practitioners for quite some time: the intelligibility principle, which has already been discussed to some extent in section 3.2, as opposed to the nativeness principle. The nativeness principle states that it is both possible and desirable for learners to achieve native-like pronunciation in a foreign language. Before the 1960s, this principle was clearly dominant in phonological instruction, but it lost support when findings in ESL research showed that nativeness in pronunciation seemed to be biologically conditioned to occur before adulthood rather than to be learnable in secondary-school or university contexts. It was concluded, therefore, that aiming for native-like pronunciation was an unrealistic target for teachers and students alike. The effect of age is an issue in applied linguistic research even now, since extensive studies on the critical period for pronunciation acquisition are still being conducted. In practice, however, only few adults seem to be able to acquire L1-like pronunciation. Factors such as motivation, amount of first language use, and phonological training have been identified as correlating positively with nativeness in pronunciation. Nevertheless, there seem to be a few studies suggesting that none of those appear to overcome the effects of the critical period, which was first investigated by Lenneberg in the 1960s (Flege & Freida 1995 and Moyer 1999, referred to in Levis 2005: 370). Albeit sometimes criticised, the nativeness principle is undoubtedly needed "as a model, a goal, almost an inspiration" (Davies 1996: 157, quoted in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 2001: 99) and thus serves important practical functions.

The intelligibility principle, on the other hand, holds that foreign language learners simply need to be understandable. It accepts that communication can be successful even in situations when foreign accents are strong or at least clearly noticeable. According to this

principle, there is no correlation between accent and understanding, and comprehensibility need not necessarily be impaired by any pronunciation error. Though being an admittedly vague linguistic dimension, intelligibility is still central in the ELF debate (see section 3.2). Supporters of the intelligibility principle believe that different features have different effects on understanding, which means that phonological instruction should emphasise those features that are most helpful for intelligibility and in turn deprioritise those which are seen as being unhelpful. The argument for differential importance in pronunciation teaching gave rise to the notion that, for instance, suprasegmentals should be favoured against segmentals; this would lead to better and quicker speaker intelligibility (Levis 2005: 370-371). However, as mentioned above, this view has been put into perspective in recent years, and many researchers now approve of a more balanced approach, most of all in long-term pronunciation courses.

Currently, a dominance of the intelligibility principle can be noticed, and in order to help students with their pronunciation, teachers should not see the rare learner who achieves a native-like accent as the achievable ideal but rather as an exception. Still, both the intelligibility and the nativeness principle continue to influence phonological instruction within the foreign language curriculum, “both in how they relate to communicative context and in the relationship of pronunciation to identity” (Levis 2005: 371). Therefore, it seems legitimate to view these two principles as complementary rather than contradictory.

Apart from the issue of age, other factors can also affect the students’ ability to learn and sufficiently produce the phonological features of a foreign language. In this context, linguistic factors such as the influence of the learners’ L1 on L2 acquisition, and sociocultural factors such as the desire to maintain an L1 accent or, the exact opposite, to acquire a native English accent are often mentioned. Furthermore, affective factors such as the learners’ attitudinal and emotional states, and their involvement in instructional decisions need to be taken into account as well. Baker & Murphy (2011: 41) maintain that students’ choice as regards accents or learning processes is a key consideration when addressing the aforementioned factors affecting the learning of English pronunciation.

Naturally, curricula play a major role when devising a pronunciation programme within a wider ELT classroom context. Five themes or priorities frequently appear in the relevant literature (Baker & Murphy 2011: 41):

- integration of pronunciation in the English language-learning curriculum
- assessment of speech intelligibility
- a shifting list of phonological hierarchies that alternate between suprasegmentals or segmentals as priorities
- target pronunciation models such as providing learners with a variety of native-speaker and/or non-native-speaker models
- setting realistic goals for learners

In order for all the priorities mentioned so far to be adequately carried over into classroom practice, the teacher must also have specific competences and skills available to them. It goes without saying that knowledge of phonology (subject matter knowledge) and knowledge of techniques and approaches for teaching pronunciation (pedagogical content knowledge) are the foundation of successful phonological instruction, which has been stated and identified by a number of specialists in the field (Celce-Murcia, Brinton et al. 2010; Morley 1991; Murphy 1997 and Parish 1977, all referred to in Baker & Murphy 2011: 41).

Moreover, knowledge of how to give students feedback, how to demonstrate students what they are actually doing when uttering English sounds, how to set pronunciation priorities, plan activities, evaluate learners' progress, and how to enable students to both hear and produce sounds are also required skills of pronunciation teachers. This is emphasised by works on phonological instruction of both the 1980s and the 1990s (Morley 1994 and Kenworthy 1987, referred to in Baker & Murphy 2011: 41). Baker & Murphy (2011: 41) stress, however, that until today hardly any research on pronunciation teachers' knowledge of phonology or the characteristics of contemporary methodology in pronunciation teaching has been conducted. In order to close this apparent research gap, scholars and academics must seek to initiate more linguistic studies and projects that are concerned with the teacher's perspective.

In conclusion, the priorities in pronunciation teaching today can be summarised as follows (a selection of points taken from Avery & Ehrlich 1992: xvi):

- Teachers must set realistic goals (e.g. with regard to the attainment of a native-like accent).
- Teachers must focus on critical errors and features of a student's speech that are most responsible for incomprehensibility.
- Students must be made aware of aspects of their pronunciation that result in other people being unable to understand them.



- Students must be given the opportunity to practise aspects of the English sound system which are crucial for their own improvement (in meaningful contexts).
- Both segmental and suprasegmental features of language must be focused on in order to improve students' intelligibility.

### 4.3 Pronunciation problems of Austrian EFL learners

In the following, major pronunciation issues of Austrian learners of English will be discussed, since those should also influence the phonology component of school curricula. Wieden & Nemser (1991) have dedicated a whole volume of *Tübinger Beiträge zur Linguistik: Language Development* to the pronunciation of English in Austria, presenting a large-scale developmental and regional study. The respondents, young English L2 learners at various stages of language proficiency, were drawn from four regions: Graz, Innsbruck, Salzburg and Vienna. Each region was represented by 96 schoolchildren, all of whom had L1-German speaking parents. The spoken data was analysed auditorily by three native speakers of British English and by Wieden himself. These acceptability judgements were then analysed linguistically by both authors, which resulted in a detailed phonetic specification. If any ambiguous data occurred, it was further subjected to acoustic analysis. (Wieden & Nemser 1991: 14-15)

A detailed account of their findings with regard to the whole of the German and English sound systems would go beyond the scope of this diploma thesis, which is why only the most outstanding problems with segmental and suprasegmental features have been selected for discussion. As the pronunciation model underlying this study is British English RP (Received Pronunciation) only, nothing is said about Austrian learners' pronunciation of other regional varieties or accents. Unfortunately, no comparable studies investigating the characteristics and problems of Austrian learners with segmental and prosodic features of other varieties of English could be found, which is why the following findings are solely based on RP.

### 4.3.1 Vowel sounds

Generally speaking, the production of RP vowels seems to be difficult for Austrian speakers of German who learn English. According to Wieden & Nemser (1991: 51), for example, only 57% of all /i:/-sounds in their study were pronounced correctly, which is, however, the highest percentage of vowel congruence achieved in the study. At the other end of the table rank /ʊə/ and /ɜ:/ with a mere 8.0% and 5.6% respectively produced correctly.

The deviant pronunciation of RP sounds by Austrian learners has a number of reasons. Firstly, Austrian learners seem to have problems with shortening and lengthening vowel sounds, which Wieden & Nemser (1991: 56) have found to appear especially in the ‘high categories’ of the IPA vowel chart (vowel trapezoid), i.e. /i:/, /ɪ/, /u:/ and /ʊ/. Moreover, high vowels are often raised even further, which may suggest L1 transfer, as the position of ‘high category’ Austrian German vowels is generally higher than in RP.

Problems with the ‘low central category’ (/ɜ:/, /ʌ/, /ə/ and /ɑ:/) are due to the influence of transfer, which results in a propensity of Austrian learners to lower RP central vowels. In addition, /ɜ:/ is also diphthongised and /ʌ/ frequently fronted. Wieden & Nemser (1991: 57) even discovered a tendency towards merger in the central group, which becomes apparent in the observed lengthening of /ə/ and the shortening of /ɜ:/. The data also shows that /ɑ:/ is often fronted and shortened.

As regards other vowels and their replicas, the following could be noticed by Wieden & Nemser (1991: 56-58):

- raising of /æ/
- shift of /e/ towards /æ/
- lowering of /ɔ:/
- diphthongisation of /ɔ:/ when the spelling form of the vowel precedes an ‘r’, e.g. in ‘sport’ or ‘blackboard’
- raising of /ɒ/

Thus, the pronunciation of vowel segments obviously has to be part of any EFL curriculum, because intelligibility would be seriously impaired if vowel quality markedly deviated from the standard. Issues such as shortening, lengthening, raising and lowering would have to be addressed in the language classroom with appropriate exercises.

### 4.3.2 Consonant sounds

In contrast to RP vowel sounds, consonant sounds do not seem to be as difficult for Austrian learners to produce. In the study by Wieden & Nemser (1991: 54), the percentages of convergence for the consonants /m/, /h/ and /j/ are 99.3%, 98.7% and 98.0% respectively. This clearly indicates that learners do not have any serious problems pronouncing those sounds. However, at the bottom of the table, /ʒ/, /v/, /z/ and /dʒ/ only have convergence percentages ranging from 18.2% to 4.2%, which could be explained by the fact that those sounds are either not part of the Austrian German consonant system, or entirely differently used or produced.

As for the obstruent group, Wieden & Nemser (1991: 63) have found a tendency towards an abandonment of the fortis/lenis (unvoiced/voiced) distinction among all obstruents, with fortition apparently being the more frequent deviation from the standard pronunciation. The distinction between /v/ and /w/, two members of the labial continuant group, is usually made by the opening/closing and rounding/unrounding parameters, which both present a problem to Austrian learners. Pronouncing the consonant sounds /θ/ and /ð/ correctly also appears to be a challenge for learners. The Austrian English pronunciation of /θ/ is characterised by backing, whereas /ð/ is characterised by closing and backing. In order to facilitate the pronunciation of these two sounds, Austrian learners often also replace /θ/ and /ð/ by /s/ and /d/ respectively. Clearly, the reason for this is the German consonant system's lack of /θ/ and /ð/.

### 4.3.3 Suprasegmental features

Prosodic elements of pronunciation, which have received particular attention by more recent approaches to phonological instruction and ELT in general, are essential for intelligible speech. Wieden & Nemser (1991: 231) also investigated the characteristics of suprasegmental features of Austrian learners' English, and found that short rudimentary rhythmic units are frequently interrupted by pauses. Moreover, rising pausal intonational contours in the learners' speech could also be observed; however, such short rhythmic units seem to be lacking an internal structure.

In the early stages of learning English, the use of word stress appears to be “pre-systemic, imitative, memorized stress patterns for individual words, sometimes seemingly systematic because superficially correct” (Wieden & Nemser 1991: 233). Similarly, rhythm and intonation show general, pre-systemic characteristics, i.e. rhythmic units are not defined by clear nuclei, contracted or reduced forms, or stress timing (Wieden & Nemser 1991: 233).

Word stress at intermediate level is characterised by some transfer of stress rules from German (as in /trænsˈpɔːˈteɪbl/, for instance) and some over-generalisation of target-language rules (as in /ˈhəʊtel/, for example). Furthermore, it was found that some items the informants had to produce were systematically and not imitatively correct. The systematic acquisition of rhythm and stress appears to start in the intermediate stage with the development of coherent rhythmic groups and beginnings of reduction and contraction, which sounds, as Wieden’s & Nemser’s (1991: 234) analyst remarked, “like typical Austrian English”.

At advanced level, word stress sub-rules are differentiated within the general rules, and a relatively high rate of target-like productions could be observed. As regards rhythm and stress, prominence is only sometimes used as a rhythmic principle, and reduction and contraction also begin to occur. Furthermore, stress timing appears to emerge together with a general extension of the prosodic domain, which can be seen by learners paying attention to rhythm, stress and intonation in longer utterances. (Wieden & Nemser 1991: 234)

The results of this study of the early 1990s clearly shows which suprasegmental features need to be centred on in ELT in Austria. With adapted pronunciation curricula and different teaching foci, reduction and contraction could certainly be taught in language learning stages prior to ‘advanced’. The same applies to word stress, which could surely be improved earlier so that there would be no prolonged influence by L1 stress patterns. In addition, stress timing and the use of pauses need to be addressed in the language classroom as well in order to enable students to speak intelligibly.

## **5. Pronunciation tasks and teaching ideas**

This chapter will explore different tasks and task types suggested for both explicit and implicit pronunciation teaching. Since explicit phonological instruction has had a longer tradition than implicit pronunciation teaching, the number of suggested activities for the latter is lower than for the former. However, this is not supposed to indicate that there should be more explicit than implicit pronunciation teaching in the language classroom. As already mentioned in previous chapters, implicit phonological instruction is gaining momentum within TEFL, and the extent of explicit pronunciation teaching today is very much dependent upon the curriculum and the goals of the language course.

### **5.1 Explicit vs. implicit pronunciation teaching**

Both explicit and implicit methods of phonological instruction have their place in ELT curricula. The answer to the question which of the two is to favour will be subject to the objectives of the class and the needs of the learners. Hence, it would be highly unprofessional to disregard or denounce either of these two didactic principles as being inappropriate in language teaching today.

In explicit or ‘synthetic’ pronunciation teaching, students will study the associations between letters and their sounds. This may comprise classroom activities as simple as showing the learners graphemes and teaching them the corresponding sounds. Teachers may also choose the alternative route and introduce the sounds first, then presenting visual cues (i.e. the graphemes) for the sound. According to Hempenstall (2001), explicit programmes involve methods such as blending (i.e. combining individual sounds) and segmenting (i.e. pronouncing sounds of words one by one). These are sensible ways of starting to teach the pronunciation component of a language, since

[i]t is of little value knowing what are the building blocks of our language’s structure if one does not know how to put those blocks together appropriately to allow written communication, or to separate them to enable decoding of a letter grouping. (Hempenstall 2001)

An explicit programme may then be continued by introducing so-called ‘phonograms’ (i.e. more complex grapheme combinations which result in a variety of sounds and sound combinations such as <er>, <ir>, <ur>, <wor>, <ear>, <sh>, <ee>, <th>) and using reading tasks to ensure learner progress. In this context, Hempenstall (2001) advocates the use of ‘controlled vocabulary’ stories that only include words decodable by the students’ current lexical and phonological knowledge.

Implicit phonological instruction, on the other hand, aims at the integration of pronunciation issues into other activities without specifically focusing on the sound system. In order for such activities to be considered implicit, they must be contextualised and relevant for the learners. Formal features of speech should be linked with communicative functions; however, the acquisition of meta-linguistic knowledge of sounds and speech production is clearly not centred on in implicit pronunciation teaching. (Levis & Grant 2003: 14)

The following section introduces a series of illustrative pronunciation tasks and activities – some explicit, some implicit, some adaptable – which will be described as to what their purpose is and how they are sequenced. In Dalton & Seidlhofer’s (1994) *Pronunciation*, their approach is similar: First, phonological features of English are introduced, and then selected activities (e.g. taken from ELT course books) are explained and further analysed. Since the number of publications on pronunciation teaching is still scarce, the subsequent selection of sample activities was mostly taken from two influential works by Pennington (1996) and Kelly (2002).

## **5.2 Sample pronunciation activities**

### **5.2.1 Activities aimed at improving consonant pronunciation**

Among the different activities that are suggested for the teaching of consonant pronunciation, repetition practice and minimal pairs can be found. Mechanical (i.e. explicit) exercises like these, though not providing any meaningful context, have been heavily criticised by supporters of certain approaches to pronunciation teaching. It has also been suggested,

however, that they might still foster students' phonological competence. Surely, issues such as learner motivation and the communicative aspect of tasks like these must be addressed as well; however, it does not appear inappropriate for teachers to make use of explicit pronunciation activities occasionally in order to focus on individual phonological features or problems. Pennington (1996: 75-76) suggests the following repetition practice exercise for learners who find it difficult to contrast voiced/voiceless stops:

Students repeat the minimal pairs of voiceless and voiced syllables [pa/ba] [ta/da] [ka/ga] etc. [ap/ab] [at/ad] [ak/ag] etc. after the teacher, first in chorus and then individually.

Another task that involves minimal pairs and is equally suitable in explicit pronunciation teaching programmes is a discrimination practice activity in which students have to guess whether the consonant sound of a minimal pair syllable is voiced or voiceless. The teacher pronounces the syllable and the learners are asked to hold up one finger if they believe the sound is voiceless or two fingers for a voiced consonant. The next step in this activity would be to allow students to 'be the teacher', as it were, and pronounce the syllables for the class. Surely, learners do not need to use their fingers to indicate the voice quality of a consonant sound; alternatively, they could, for instance, also use self-made sheets of paper saying 'voiced' and 'voiceless', or even 'v+' and 'v-'. To make this exercise suitable for pair work, a slight variation would be necessary: In each student pair, one learner indicates whether a syllable contains a voiced or voiceless consonant and then gives the turn to their partner. In order to provide a bit more language context, one-syllable words could also be used instead of two-sound syllables, e.g. pat/bat, time/dime, pack/back, back/bag. (Pennington 1996: 77-78)

A traditional activity originating from the Communicative Approach of the 1970s and 1980s, which can be seen as a more explicit exercise, is the use of tongue twisters. In Pennington's (1996: 77-78) suggestion, students repeat simplified tongue twisters first in chorus and then individually. Since particularly young learners enjoy 'playing' with language, activities like these are usually experienced as pleasurable and motivating. An example for such a tongue twister is given below (Pennington 1996: 78):

Peter Piper picked a pepper.  
Tiny Tim took his time.  
Ken can't cook Cajun cauliflower.

A frequently heard criticism of explicit pronunciation teaching is the lack of context, which can be refuted by the activities' motivational and encouraging effects if they are designed appropriately. Pennington's (1996: 78) next suggestion involves contextual discrimination and asks students to work in pairs. She provides two mini-dialogues which learners need to practise and make a choice which of the two words to use in the given context. Learners could also be encouraged to invent new dialogues, present them to the class or in groups and receive feedback from their teacher and peers. Pennington's suggestion of having the students practise the dialogues might not seem to be an effective way of acquiring pronunciation, most of all considering recent research in language pedagogy that has been referred to earlier. As an alternative, the student pairs might just be asked to read the dialogues together or to each other – the latter option would even allow one learner to provide corrective feedback to their partner. Dialogues as the two presented below could be used for such an activity (Pennington 1996: 78):

- (1) *pat/bat*  
 S1: I want to \_\_\_\_\_ that kitten.  
 S2: Go ahead and \_\_\_\_\_ it.
- S1: I want to \_\_\_\_\_ that ball.  
 S2: Go ahead and \_\_\_\_\_ it.
- (2) *time/dime*  
 S1: I can't see the clock. Do you have the \_\_\_\_\_?  
 S2: Yes, the \_\_\_\_\_ is...  
 No, I don't have the \_\_\_\_\_.
- S1: I need to make a call. Do you have a \_\_\_\_\_?  
 S2: Yes, here is a \_\_\_\_\_.  
 No, I'm sorry, but I don't have a \_\_\_\_\_.

In another, more communicative and meaningful (i.e. implicit) practice activity that focuses on the contrast between /p/ and /f/, groups of three to four students are asked to make up a story based on a set of given phrases. Each group is supposed to write their story and subsequently present it to the rest of the class (Pennington 1996: 83):

a picnic in the park  
 fifteen famished people  
 flipping frisbees  
 fifty plastic forks  
 pickled pigs' feet

a pretty April afternoon  
 families playing  
 a pack of paper plates  
 pink party punch  
 flavorful pork



fresh fish fillets  
French fried potatoes  
plump purple plums

plenty of pepper  
forty fat figs

Students could also conduct personal surveys with questions such as the ones suggested below by Pennington (1996: 84). Of course, a variety of pre- and post-tasks could be imagined here, e.g. finding alternative questions for the survey (pre-task) or preparing a presentation of the survey's results (post-task).

- (1) Do you eat pork with a fork?
- (2) Do you like French fried potatoes?
- (3) Which do you like better, plums, figs, or neither?
- (4) Which color do you like better, pink or purple?
- (5) Do you know a park where we can go on a picnic?
- (6) How many people [are there] in your family?

### **5.2.2 Activities aimed at improving vowel pronunciation**

The teaching of vowel sounds is a vital part of pronunciation teaching, since too much variation of vowel quality can result in unintelligible speech. Although English native speakers usually appear to be quite tolerant of different ways of pronouncing a given vowel, certain vowel sounds may still be problematic for non-native speakers. Depending on the learners' L1, there are potentially many vowels that might prove difficult to pronounce or understand. The words 'soap' /səʊp/ and 'soup' /su:p/ as well as 'paper' /'peɪpə/ and 'pepper' /'pepə/ can serve as illustrative examples here. (Kelly 2002: 37)

Using phonemic charts (i.e. the vowel trapezoid) to make the articulation of sounds more obvious and hence familiarise learners with the pronunciation rules may be a reasonable pedagogical strategy if they are used in conjunction with dictionaries to introduce new sounds and correct sounds that have already been covered in class (Kelly 2002: 37). However, teachers must be aware that an overuse of phonemic charts could result in the students having only a very abstract notion of pronunciation: They might be able to reproduce the rules of articulation but might be unable to pronounce the actual sounds correctly. In order to avoid such developments, it is the responsibility of the teacher to find a sensible balance of

theoretical and practical work on pronunciation, which should – at least in part – be determined by the needs of the learners.

Kelly (2002: 37) also maintains that drills are “one of the teacher’s best tools” when it comes to the teaching of vowel sounds. When used in class, sounds should be drilled together with the structures or lexis currently being addressed or practiced in class. This is especially important for the students to see how the sounds integrate into the general language environment that is being covered in the classroom. Kelly (2002: 37-38) suggests a “light-hearted” approach to the teaching of isolated sounds, i.e. he combines vowel sounds with descriptions that are more memorable than linguistic explanations for both students and teachers. For illustration, a few vowel descriptions have been selected and can be found below. For the full list see Kelly (2002: 38-39).

Sound	Suggestion
<b>Vowels</b>	
i:	A ‘smiling’ sound. Smile widely, make and hold the sound. Demonstrate that it is a ‘long’ sound.
ɪ	Make the sound, and make it obviously short. If necessary, contrast it with /i:/.
ʊ	A short sound. Exaggerate the forward position of your lips. One way into this sound is to ask students what noise a gorilla makes!
u:	Make and hold the sound. Use a ‘rising and falling’ intonation, as if you’ve heard something surprising, or some interesting gossip (uuUUuu). Demonstrate that it is a ‘long’ sound.
[...]	[...]
<b>Diphthongs</b>	For all diphthongs, one of the best techniques is to get students to make and hold the first element, then slowly move to the second. Finish off by making the sound at a ‘normal’ speed. Some other suggestions are made below.
ɪə	Make the sound while tugging your ear.
[...]	[...]
eə	Liken this to the word <i>air</i> . Point to your hair. Say <i>over there</i> , or <i>on the chair</i> . All will give good examples of the sound, which you can then isolate.
[...]	[...]

Of course, this list can be used in class, where it would be advisable to associate the descriptions with pictures, e.g. a picture of a sheep for the sound /i:/. However, if a student

knows the word and habitually mispronounces it, this method could lead to the wrong pronunciation of the sound becoming even further entrenched. Nonetheless, Kelly (2002: 39) suggests the use of phonemic symbols at all times. In his view, it does not matter whether the learners are familiar with the IPA system and its symbols, as long as their purpose is clearly explained to the students. If they are regularly used by the teacher, and if students are shown that those symbols are also used in dictionaries, learners will recognise their relevance and significance. Kelly (2002: 39) defends explicit pronunciation teaching by stating that if phonemic script is used as a normal part of teaching, and not something ‘special’ or specifically ‘technical’, it can be a very valuable classroom tool.

‘Phonemic bingo’ is a sample activity suggested by Kelly (2002: 40-41) aimed at improving learners’ pronunciation of particular vowel sounds. The only materials needed are self-made bingo cards which have a good range of phonemic vowel symbols on them. In monolingual classes, which is the usual ELT setting in the majority of regions in Austria, the phonemic symbols on the bingo cards could reflect typical problem sounds for speakers of the L1 in question (i.e., in an Austrian setting, German). Example bingo cards could be designed as shown below:

	e	əʊ
æ	i:	
	ɔɪ	ʌ

ʌ		ə
ɑ:	aɪ	æ
	eə	

In order to play the game, students are handed out one card each, and the sounds are then called out by the teacher (or, alternatively, a volunteer, or a learner chosen by the teacher) one by one. The students have to cross or cover the sounds on their cards that they have heard. This ‘calling’ of the sounds can be varied according to the learner group’s needs and abilities: One option is to produce the sounds only, without any other verbal context. Another, possibly more effective option is to call out whole words. Students would then have to recognise the respective sounds in the words uttered by the teacher and thereby complete their bingo card. The rules for winning the game are the same as for traditional bingo, i.e. when a learner has crossed all sounds on their card, they shout ‘Bingo!’ and the card will be checked. This ‘checking’ of the winning card is actually a vital part of the learning value of this activity, as the whole class examines the card together with the teacher to see whether the

student who was first to cross all sounds on their bingo card really had the right answer for each sound or word. Of course, ‘phonemic bingo’ can also be used for practising consonant sounds. (Kelly 2002: 41)

Another (apparently more implicit) teaching idea is an exercise involving collaborative writing, which can be used from elementary level onwards. Learners only need strips of paper to write on for this task. Naturally, studying vowel sounds presents the teacher with a wide range of different activities that work with rhyme. Collaborative poem writing is a particularly rewarding task for both pairs and small groups. Such exercises can be designed more or less openly, i.e. the teacher might feel it necessary to direct the learners’ work in some way, e.g. by telling them that a certain number of lines have to start with a personal pronoun or with a word starting or containing a specific vowel sound. The amount of ‘rules’ will surely be governed by the characteristics and proficiency levels of the learner groups in question. However, Kelly (2002: 43) believes that defining criteria for a collaborative poem writing task ensures “a degree of readability”. Depending on the number of sounds being worked on in class, the last word in every (second) line should end with the respective sound in order to make the whole product a rhyming poem. Kelly (2002: 44) presents a number of random lines that have been written by a group of intermediate students working on the sound /i:/:

Is this seat free?  
He had a cup of tea  
I damaged my knee  
Would you like a coffee?  
‘To be’ or not ‘to be’  
I sat under a tree  
I got stung by a bee  
Yesterday I lost my key  
I want to be free

As a follow-up activity, the student groups could be asked to put all their strips of paper with all the individual lines into a box or on a pile so that they can be drawn from there and be rearranged by the groups to make new poems. As Kelly (2002: 44) holds, “[t]he finished piece may not be great poetry, but the task focuses students successfully on the sound in question”. If the teacher noticed that certain spelling patterns for the respective sounds prevail in the poems (e.g. word-final <ee> for /i:/), alternative orthographic spellings for this sound could be examined, possibly also for word-initial or mid-word position.

This collaborative poem writing task may be seen as an implicit pronunciation teaching activity if the obvious focus of the lesson for the students is producing a poem, and not necessarily working on vowel pronunciation. Depending on the teacher's preference or the students' needs, such exercises are clearly adaptable: Their introduction, focus and the sequencing of sub-tasks determines whether they can be considered explicit or implicit.

### **5.2.3 Activities aimed at improving word and sentence stress**

Language teachers must be aware that students need a wide range of information about newly introduced vocabulary items, e.g. meaning, collocation, spelling and pronunciation. Kelly (2002: 75) names 'currency' as another important piece of information about a lexical item, i.e. whether there are any situational restrictions of use or common collocation patterns for the word in question. Undoubtedly, all the facts mentioned above are essential for a foreign language speaker in order to communicate successfully; however, it is the pronunciation component, and in particular prosodic features, that needs to be mastered to a certain extent in order to produce intelligible speech (Levis 2005: 369).

Stressed and unstressed syllables need to play a major role in any pronunciation curriculum, and the learners' awareness of these suprasegmentals can be continually encouraged and raised in a number of ways. The first step for successful production of word and sentence stress is receptive awareness, which – according to Kelly (2002: 75) – can be effectively combined with the productive skill in choral and individual drilling of new words. It is, nevertheless, of paramount importance for teachers to accept that successful repetition in drilling exercises does not necessarily lead to continued actual production during different practice activities or outside the language classroom. Kelly (2002: 75) therefore argues for a large amount of practice time to be dedicated to activities that aim at improving stress on both word and sentence level.

If students have difficulty stressing individual lexical or whole syntactic units, an alternative approach to teaching word and sentence stress would be to exaggerate the pronunciation of stressed and unstressed syllables. Other techniques commonly employed by ELT practitioners include beating out stress patterns with one's hands or fingers, tapping on a table with a pen, or speaking or singing the patterns of word and sentence stress, for example

by using simple syllables or melodies (e.g. DA da da). Additionally, pronunciation teaching researchers and experienced language teachers such as Pennington (1996) and Kelly (2002) recommend listening activities.

Since word stress is a vital feature of the pronunciation of any lexical item, it is important for teachers to get into the habit of indicating stress patterns of new words as soon as they occur in texts or materials, or when they are presented by the teacher – particularly for words that students need to remember and actively use. There are a number of ways of indicating stress patterns when a word is written on the board (Kelly 2002: 76):

- Circles or boxes can be written above or below the word.
- Marks can be put before the stressed syllable, e.g. *ushe'rette*. This is also a convention used in phonetic transcription, which students will be confronted with when working with dictionaries.
- The stressed syllable can be underlined, e.g. *technical*.
- Capital letters can be used to indicate the stressed syllable, e.g. *comPUter*.

As regards sentence stress, drilling can be used as an effective method for highlighting both stress and weak forms in longer utterances. Kelly (2002: 76), however, advises teachers to be cautious of not exaggerating sentence stress in practice activities, e.g. by stressing too many elements within an utterance. In order to avoid this, beating out the stress patterns (similar to what has been suggested for word stress) and front or back chaining (i.e. starting with a part of an utterance and then adding parts before or after it to make it a sentence or long stretch of speech) are recommended methodological strategies that can be employed by the teacher.

One activity that focuses on contrastive stress and can be used for all proficiency levels is called 'Three Little Words'. Its aim is to demonstrate the effect of shifting the tonic syllable within an utterance. In Kelly's (2002: 77-78) example, the sentence worked on is 'I love you'. After writing it on the board and asking the learners which part of the sentence they would stress, the teacher writes the sentence again twice more. In pairs or individually, students then have to find the differences in meaning when the stressed word is no longer 'love' but 'I' or 'you'. Below are some suggested answers:

I love you (...and I want you to know this).  
I love you. (I don't love her.)  
I love you. (He doesn't!)

Of course, there are also a number of exercises centring on word stress, one being the classical word-stress categorisation task, which requires students to find the correct stress patterns for a series of words. No additional materials apart from the exercise sheet are required for this practice task. The example below uses job titles and professions as words whose stress patterns need to be found. A lesson on the language of working life and jobs could hence be the background of this exercise. In order to ensure that the learners have understood the basic principle of assigning patterns of stress to individual words, the teacher may start by eliciting one or two words from the task and then ask the students to identify the stressed syllable. Since the stress patterns on the task sheet are given in circles (e.g. oOoo), learners should also be introduced to this form of depicting word stress in advance. This exercise (taken from Kelly 2002: 80) can be done by students individually or in pairs:

Put these words into the correct columns, according to the stress pattern.				
Oo	Ooo	oOo	Oooo	ooOo
Plumber	Electrician	Doctor	Journalist	Musician
Shop assistant	Teacher	Soldier	Novelist	Architect
Carpenter	Actor	Policeman	Fireman	Lecturer
Florist	Businessman	Artist	Farmer	Scientist
	Researcher	Gardener	Designer	

Such activities can also be used when working on particular sounds, e.g. by using items of vocabulary that frequently include the sound in question and/or sounds commonly confused with this sound. To make this task a more explicit pronunciation exercise, students might be asked to underline or mark instances of the sound currently focused on in the words given in the box. This would surely increase the learners' phonological awareness and at the same time force them to contrast two or more sounds that they have difficulty identifying or pronouncing.

Furthermore, categorisation tasks are an appropriate way of practising the differences in stress patterns for words that can be used as, for example, nouns and verbs. If students have never heard about these differences before, it might be advisable for the teacher to read out all or at least some of the words that appear in the subsequent exercise. Alternatively,

categorisation tasks could also be used as discovery exercises in which the students are expected to make educated guesses as to how the word forms in question are pronounced correctly. The following table exemplifies such a categorisation task (adapted from Kelly 2002: 81):

According to the stress pattern, decide for each word whether it is a noun, verb or adjective. Circle the correct option.	
Oo	oO
import (NOUN – VERB)	import (NOUN – VERB)
rebel (NOUN – VERB)	rebel (NOUN – VERB)
increase (NOUN – VERB)	increase (NOUN – VERB)
export (NOUN – VERB)	export (NOUN – VERB)
decrease (NOUN – VERB)	decrease (NOUN – VERB)
insult (NOUN – VERB)	insult (NOUN – VERB)
content (NOUN – ADJECTIVE)	content (NOUN – ADJECTIVE)

A slight variation of this kind of task is suggested by Kelly (2002: 81): In order to provide a different classroom dynamic, students could be given a word on a card and then be asked to organise themselves into ‘stress pattern groups’, or attach their cards to the board in columns which have been drawn beforehand.

While reading aloud has been traditionally rejected by ELT researchers as being a waste of time and an inappropriate method of improving reading competence (Hill & Dobbyn 1979: 62, quoted in Amer 1997: 43), it undoubtedly has its place in the realm of pronunciation teaching. It can be combined with, for instance, voice recording to deal with phonological issues alongside the study of grammar and lexis. Naturally, reading-aloud activities may be used to work on and improve the pronunciation of segmental features, but students should also be encouraged to identify the ways in which stress (and, of course, intonation) can affect the overall message of any utterance. As variations in stress might also change or even confuse the meaning of a statement, teachers should draw the learners’ attention to these areas of pronunciation. (Kelly 2002: 81)

At the same time, Kelly (2002: 81) maintains that there are two major problems with reading aloud: Firstly, individual stresses in utterances will be adversely affected if a learner has difficulties recognising words within a given text. Consequently, what is read aloud by the student might sound stilted and unnatural. Secondly, as there are clear differences between written and spoken language, it would be a problem if learners were asked to speak sentences which were not designed to be read out aloud. The length and grammatical



complexity of such sentences pose unnecessary problems to students, which could result in their being unable to identify stress and tonic syllable placement. Thus, teachers need to choose texts for such activities carefully in order for reading aloud to be a useful activity in the language classroom. Common criteria for text selection are length as well as syntactic and lexical complexity, which render the following types of text particularly suitable (Kelly 2002: 82):

- short biographies of well-known people
- texts about students' own countries or home towns
- accounts of places that students have visited
- short 'sketches' or dramatic pieces
- poetry

The teaching of word and sentence stress, however, cannot stand alone when dealing with suprasegmental features of pronunciation. Mastering intonation and intonation patterns is yet another vital aspect that must be part of the phonological component of any ELT curriculum. This will be the focus of the following section.

#### **5.2.4 Activities aimed at improving intonation**

The concept of intonation is closely connected with the notion of 'interpretability', i.e. the ways in which an utterance can be interpreted. 'Interpretability' is part of Jenkins's (2000: 69-73) definition of 'intelligibility', which should be, not only in an ELF context, one of the most important governing principles in pronunciation curriculum development. In fact, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) also views intelligibility as its main goal, but unlike ELF and LFC teaching, CLT pronunciation teaching still uses native-speaker models to a large extent in order to give learners clear and unambiguous guidance (Munro 2011: 7-9).

Although there is neither a universally agreed upon definition of this construct of 'intelligibility' nor an agreed upon way of measuring it, a common tripartite conceptualisation of the term is provided by Smith & Nelson (1985), who define 'intelligibility' as the listener's ability to recognise individual words and utterances, 'comprehensibility' as the ability of the listener to understand the meaning of the word or utterance in its given context, and 'interpretability' as the listener's ability to understand the

speaker's intentions behind the word or utterance (Smith & Nelson 1985, referred to in Pickering 2006: 219). In order for students to communicate effectively and in order for them not to be misunderstood, learner intonation patterns must be orientated towards L1-English speech prosody, which surely is a very strong argument against the promotion of ELF teaching.

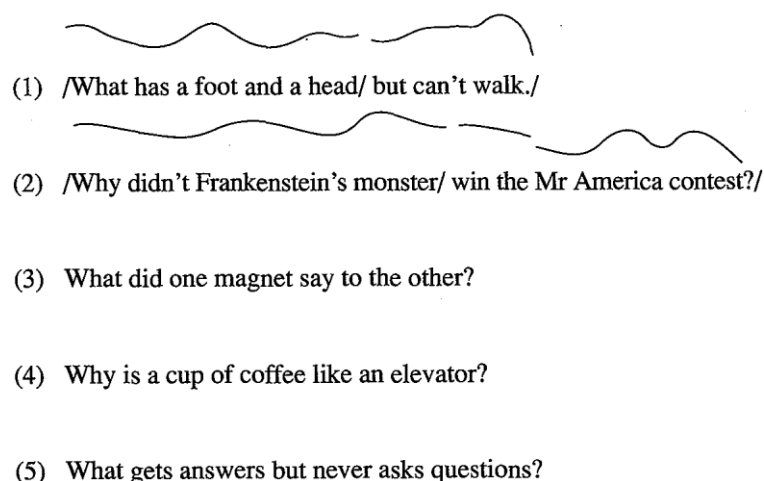
Kendrick (1997: 549) admits that teaching intonation can be quite a demanding task for the foreign language teacher. For a small-scale project study, she developed a number of activities suitable for intonation teaching and subsequently gathered interesting research results. Her activities included both explicit and implicit methods, e.g. "listening for rise and fall and using gestures or patterns to illustrate pitch changes" (Kendrick 1997: 549) for the former, and voice shadowing (i.e. tracking), drama, as well as listen/mimic activities for the latter, clearly representing a top-down approach. Kendrick (1997: 549) particularly favours the use of role-plays, since they

encouraged learners to "let themselves go", which was exactly the objective: to let their L1 characteristics go, in favour of the target L2 characteristics. Short plays were used such as the Radio Play in "Act English" (Watcyn-Jones, 1978), "The Marriage Bureau" (Swan, 1983) and "The Cinema", from "After Liverpool" (Saunders, 1973). They introduce intonation patterns reflecting attitudinal changes from pleasure to fear, disinterest and uncertainty to irritation and anger, as well as the need for contrastive stress to express the differing wishes of characters.

In her summary of findings, Kendrick (1997: 552-554) states that drama and role-play activities "produced significant improvement in intonation and stress". Although this verdict was based merely on the observation of the analysing teacher, a 'test of progress' yielded similar results, namely that clearly directed pronunciation teaching in the area of intonation caused, for instance, pitch movements to accompany stress, thus having an impact on the overall communicative effectiveness of the messages. Furthermore, the improvement in the learners' general language proficiency affected their ability to identify and recognise the relative importance of parts of a message.

Among the explicit intonation practice activities is the assigning of intonation contours to given questions or statements. Pennington (1996: 167) advises teachers and material developers to divide the example sentences into 'breath groups' (i.e. speech or intonation units) in order to indicate and mark the intonation contours. Instead of marking the entire sentence, teachers may only indicate the direction of the terminal contour at the end of

each breath group, which would certainly be a more suitable exercise for advanced students. If sentences from jokes, riddles or stories are used, additional pauses (to build suspense or interest) might be necessary, which would be another added difficulty for proficient learner groups. The following example sentences are riddles and jokes taken from Pennington (1996: 167), and are intended to illustrate what kind of utterances may be used for the explicit teaching of intonation and how the intonation contours can be marked:

- 
- (1) /What has a foot and a head/ but can't walk./
  - (2) /Why didn't Frankenstein's monster/ win the Mr America contest?/
  - (3) What did one magnet say to the other?
  - (4) Why is a cup of coffee like an elevator?
  - (5) What gets answers but never asks questions?

A more implicit practice activity involving intonation teaching is concerned with expressing views on controversial topics. For this exercise, a topic for discussion must be chosen either by the teacher or the students, and it should preferably be an issue about which students have strong feelings, e.g. recycling waste, the environment, topics currently in the news etc. First, the teacher asks the learners to voice their opinion on the chosen issue, at this stage not worrying too much about the language used or the students' pronunciation. In order to use these statements productively later in the lesson, teachers are advised to summarise the opinions on the board, possibly organised in columns to illustrate opposing views. The next phase of the lesson is a brainstorming in which the students are asked to think of different ways of expressing one's view or arguing a point. This, of course, allows the teacher to elicit and, if necessary, provide new phrases or chunks of language. Should the required equipment be available, some scenes from a recorded TV discussion could also be shown to the students. (Kelly 2002: 97-98)

Since the teaching and learning of intonation and intonation patterns incorporates a number of articulatory considerations, it appears sensible in educational settings to indicate onset syllables, tonic syllables and the direction of intonation in order to facilitate learner

production. Kelly (2002: 98) exemplifies this by listing six sentences that could be used in the activity referred to above:

//↗DONT get me WRONG//  
 //↘i COULDnt agree MORE//  
 //↗AS for ME//  
 //WHAT do you make of...  
 //↘i DONT think you can SAY that//  
 //↘THATS not the POINT//

The next stages of this practice activity clearly involve even more explicit pronunciation teaching methods, as Kelly (2002: 98) argues for choral and individual drills of the collected phrases for stating one's opinion. He believes that "this is important, as the way the expressions sound will give important clues as to the attitude of the speaker to the discussion". In order to improve the learner's knowledge of the use of suprasegmental features, it is imperative for students in activities like this to practise listening out for stressed syllables and intonation patterns. However, this can only effect learners' future production positively if such an exercise is combined with a task which asks students to match a verbalised attitude to a given phrase. The following table illustrates this two-way task design (Kelly 2002: 98):

Underline the stressed syllables and mark the intonation patterns:	Match the phrases on the left with these ideas:
As for me...	I'm going to say something you might not like.
I couldn't agree more.	I'm showing strong disagreement.
Don't get me wrong, but...	I'm about to give my point of view.
What do you make of...	I disagree.
I don't think you can say that.	I'm showing strong agreement.
That's not the point.	I'm looking for your opinion.

Before introducing this exercise, teacher and students need to agree on a common method of marking intonation and prominent syllables. The method above, suggested by Kelly (2002: 98), which uses capital letters for stressed syllables and arrows for intonation contours, seems appropriate for intermediate and advanced learners. It could be argued that indicating stress and intonation this way might be challenging, but in fact, it must not be seen daunting.

Following the series of exercises in this activity, students have a number of important phrases for voicing their opinion at their disposal and at the same time have acquired the corresponding intonation patterns. Moreover, they have gained an insight into what effects

changes in stress and intonation have on the overall message of an utterance. As a follow-up activity, the teacher could then use the controversial topic introduced at the beginning of the series of exercises to initiate an actual classroom discussion, in which the learners would be required to utilise this meta-knowledge of stress and intonation in their language production when making their statements. Apparently, this would then be a rather implicit way of practising the use of stress and intonation.

In sum, it can be said that visualising stress and intonation contours are key to improve the learners' ability to effectively distinguish and produce various suprasegmental features and patterns. Both explicit and implicit task types might be appropriate, but as illustrated with the example of a class discussion above, explicit and implicit exercises can also be easily combined to create a demanding, yet encouraging, sequence of activities. This applies to tasks on word and sentence stress alike, which means that in classroom practice, teachers may even be able to use similar materials for introducing different suprasegmentals. According to Kendrick (1997), drama and role-play are also suitable for fostering the students' phonological competence, particularly when it comes to stress and intonation.

In addition, the use of modern technology for pronunciation teaching purposes can prove invaluable in the language classroom. Provided that equipment such as recording and playback devices (possibly also a computer or laptop) is available to teachers, they should make use of them in order to increase students' awareness of phonological issues and identify learners' strengths and weaknesses of their own pronunciation performance. The use of recording and playback is an evidently explicit teaching method which can be seen as an effective resource for both teachers and learners, as teachers have the opportunity to re-listen to their students' speech and recognise individual areas of possible improvement, and learners, too, have the chance to evaluate their performance, identify problems and subsequently aim at improving the pronunciation features in question. Since current educational debates centre on ways of 'individualisation' in the classroom and 'individualising' teaching in Austria, pronunciation teaching methods involving modern technology and specialised software could be regarded as conforming to this change of paradigm that has long been demanded by politicians and educational experts alike.

The following chapter will investigate the pronunciation component of four ELT course books used in Austrian English classes and approved by the Ministry of Education as to how effectively they might improve learners' pronunciation. Findings from this section,

which included sample exercises, will also be drawn on in the analysis of individual tasks and task designs.

## **6. Analysis of ELT course books**

This part of the thesis will investigate how effective the pronunciation activities in four selected ELT course books are, and will further analyse their task design and make suggestions as to how these exercises might be improved, e.g. to meet alternative student needs. All four books base their pronunciation exercises on Standard British English, have been approved by the Ministry of Education as being suitable for in-class use, and are part of two commonly used ELT textbook series in Austrian schools.

The two books that will be analysed first are the third and fourth part of the *MORE!* series, which comprises books for the first to fourth year of EFL learning (years one to four of secondary education in Austria). The series was first published by Helbling Languages in 2009 and its target learners are – due to the sole production for the Austrian market – Austrian learners of English. Intended to succeed *THE NEW YOU & ME* as probably the most popular schoolbook in the EFL sector, the *MORE!* books were written by the same ‘core’ team of authors: Günter Gerngross, Herbert Puchta and Christian Holzmann, who are all well-known schoolbook authors and ELT practitioners. For each level of the series, a number of books are available to both teachers and students (or parents), among others a student’s book, a workbook and teacher’s books. Moreover, each publication of the series may be ordered as ‘Basic course’ (for comprehensive schools) or ‘Enriched course’ (for grammar schools). In addition to the written publications, a collection of online exercises (‘Cyber Homework’) for each unit of each book of the series is available to the students. The thesis at hand will, due to the known content limitations of diploma theses, only analyse the books of the ‘Enriched course’. Since only the student’s book includes exercises on pronunciation, the other types of publications will not be focused on. However, whenever these tasks are described or explained in more detail in the teacher’s book, reference to relevant passages there will be made.

After *MORE! 3* and *4*, two books of the *LASER* series will be analysed: *LASER B1+* for intermediate students (usually used in years five and six for ELT in general secondary education in Austria) and *LASER B2* for upper-intermediate students (used in years six to eight). Written by Steve Taylore-Knowles and first published by Macmillan Hellas in 2004, *LASER B1+* has been reprinted and updated in 2008 to fit the requirements of the revised FCE (Cambridge First Certificate in English). The same applies to *LASER B2*, which was written by Malcolm Mann in collaboration with Steve Taylore-Knowles. Naturally, the *B1+* and the *B2* in the titles refer to the language levels as defined by the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), and are therefore an indication for EFL teachers when to use them in the course of a multi-year EFL curriculum. The series of *LASER* publications, whose target group are international learners of English, also includes workbooks and teacher's books to accompany the course books. Similar to *MORE!*, only the student's book features pronunciation tasks; thus, the teacher's book will only be referred to when further information or instructions are given.

Apart from the analysis of the effectiveness and suitability of the pronunciation exercises in these books, close scrutiny of the phonological component in the publications of this selection is also intended to provide insights into whether there is a clear and reasonable transition from English pronunciation teaching in lower- to upper-secondary education. The questions that need to be asked in this conjunction are whether *MORE! 3* and *4* manage to prepare students for the challenges of pronunciation acquisition in years five to eight, and whether *LASER B1+* and *B2* succeed in offering the learners such a challenge by presenting them with tasks that show an apparent line of progression. As many Austrian EFL learners and their parents criticise the vast differences in the demands of foreign-language instruction between years four and five of general secondary education that occasionally occur, any insights gained from this analysis might prove valuable to future curriculum and course-book design as regards pronunciation teaching.

The activities and exercises will be analysed with regard to their objectives, the efficiency of the methods employed, comprehensibility of the instructions, level of difficulty, and potential for adaptation and improvement. The sample activities introduced in chapter five will serve as models for comparison, in combination with McGrath's (2002) *Materials Evaluation and Design for Language Teaching*, which will provide the theoretical background for comments and remarks concerning evaluation and assessment of tasks and task design. This frame of evaluation will be introduced in the following section. After

carefully examining individual activities from the student's books, the analysis will centre on task progression of the exercises in each course book, and subsequently also within the *MORE!* and *LASER* series.

## 6.1 Frame of analysis and evaluation

The reasons why both educators and students need course books are mentioned by McGrath (2002) before he presents his criteria for textbook analysis and evaluation. He views course books as “maps” that show “where one is going and where one has been” (McGrath 2002: 10), i.e. they provide an overview of past and future objectives. Course books for foreign language teaching must also contain useful language samples and offer a great deal of variety in order for the students to find the subject matter interesting and motivating.

When it comes to an actual evaluation of teaching materials, several contextual and learner factors need to be considered. McGrath (2002: 19) provides a list of such factors that is drawn from works by Daoud & Celce-Murcia (1979), Matthews (1991), Harmer (1991), McDonough & Shaw (1993) and Cunningsworth (1995):

- age range
- proficiency level in the target language (and homogeneity within the learner group)
- first language
- academic and educational level
- socio-cultural background
- occupation (if relevant)
- attitudes to learning (including attitudes to the language, its speakers, the teacher, the institution)
- previous language-learning experience (of the target language and any other languages)
- language-learning aptitude
- general expectations (of the course/textbook/teacher/own role)
- specific wants
- preferred learning styles
- interests



Apart from learner factors, learner needs must also be taken into account when selecting and assessing teaching materials. McGrath (2002: 19-20) lists a selection of the most essential points and also emphasises the importance of needs analyses for effective course and material design:

- dialect (e.g. British versus American English)
- language-skill emphasis
- contexts and situations of use, which may require different levels of formality or different registers
- subskills
- notions
- functions
- language-system (grammar, vocabulary, phonology) emphasis
- language forms (e.g. structures, vocabulary items, features of stress or intonation)
- whether language systems will be used productively, receptively or both
- attention given to mechanics (handwriting, spelling, punctuation)

In addition to factors that concern the role of teachers and students, the specifics of the educational institution in question must also be considered (McGrath 2002: 21). Examples for these would be the number of students, syllabus, physical environment (e.g. classroom size, acoustics, etc.), aims of the course or programme, and whether additional resources are available (e.g. cassette/video recorders, projectors, photocopiers, computers, etc.).

Tomlinson (1999: 11-12, referred to in McGrath 2002: 32) specifies some of the factors mentioned above even further and suggests four categories of criteria that are relevant for the analysis of teaching materials:

- media-specific criteria (relate to the particular medium used, e.g. the audibility of an audio recording)
- content-specific criteria (relate to the nature of the material, e.g. choice of topics, situations or language)
- age-specific criteria (relate to the suitability of the material for the intended age group)
- local criteria (relate to the appropriateness of the material for the particular environment in which it is used)

To summarise, it is clear that successful teaching materials must meet the practical needs of the learners (as for pronunciation, e.g. the 'schwa'-sound for L1 speakers of German), provide support for teaching and learning (e.g. by giving additional information in a teacher's book), and appeal to the learners. It could be the case, however, that teachers need to alter or

adapt activities from course books in order to attain the lesson's objective(s) more effectively. Professional language teachers must have the ability to critically assess whether activities need adaptation or alteration in order to suit the aims of their lessons. As McGrath (2002: 12) puts it,

Yet even where teachers have no direct control over textbook selection, it is important that they are able to adopt a critical stance in relation to the material they are expected to use.

The subsequent analysis of pronunciation exercises included in four ELT course books will draw upon this frame of evaluation and will also apply McGrath's criteria to make suggestions as to how the activities under discussion could be adapted and improved.

## **6.2 *MORE! 3 and 4 Enriched course***

*MORE! 3 Enriched course* is one of the most commonly used course books for third-year EFL instruction in grammar schools. It comprises 13 units plus one extra unit, each centring on a specific topic, and four short CLIL units (music, biology, history, science). Out of these, seven include a pronunciation exercise. Each of these activities with the title 'Sounds right' focuses on a different area of English phonology, i.e. segmental features (individual sounds and sound discrimination) and suprasegmental features (word and sentence stress). *MORE! 3 Enriched course* includes pronunciation activities focusing on:

- /w/ vs. /v/ (Unit 2)
- word stress (Unit 4)
- /ð/ vs. /θ/ (Unit 5)
- sentence stress (Unit 6)
- /b/ vs. /ɔ:/ (Unit 8)
- weak sound /ə/ (Unit 9)
- /p/ (Unit 10)

There are no other tasks in *MORE! 3* that explicitly state a focus on phonological competence. However, a number of songs and poems are included, which could certainly also be used as productive language tasks orientated towards improving the learners'

pronunciation. Sections 6.2.1 to 6.2.5 will introduce and analyse a selection of five of the seven ‘Sounds right’ tasks (three centring on segmental, two on suprasegmental features).


*MORE! 4 Enriched course* is the fourth part of the *MORE!* series, designed for EFL teaching in year 4 of Austrian grammar schools. Similar to *MORE! 3*, it consists of 14 units and one extra unit, each centring on a specific topic, plus four short CLIL units (history, science, biology, geography). Seven out of the 14 regular units include one pronunciation exercise each. As in the previous parts of the series, the activities focus on both segmental and suprasegmental features of English phonology. In particular, *MORE! 4 Enriched course* includes tasks centring on:

- elision (Unit 1)
- /a:/ vs. /ʌ/ (Unit 2)
- final consonants (Unit 3)
- /ə/ (Unit 5)
- /æ/ vs. /ʌ/ vs. /e/ (Unit 6)
- word-initial /p/ (Unit 9)
- stress (Unit 14)

In sections 6.2.6 to 6.2.10, five of these seven tasks (again, three focusing on segmental, two on suprasegmental features) will be described and then critically analysed.

### 6.2.1 *MORE! 3 Enriched course* – Activity 1: /w/ vs. /v/

**Sounds right** /w/ vs. /v/



**1 Listen and repeat the words.**

<b>1</b> waiter	woman	wonderful	went	when
<b>2</b> very	video	voice	visit	vegetable

Sound discrimination and the differentiation between the consonant sounds /w/ and /v/ are at the heart of this exercise (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009a: 16). The students are asked to listen to the British native-speaker CD recording and then repeat the words. The circle underneath the CD symbol indicates that this is an easy exercise which every learner in their third year of English should be able to master. Indeed, this activity is a mere articulation exercise, as the

instructions do not tell the students to discriminate the sounds (e.g. in writing) before listening or producing them.

As a follow-up exercise, the teacher's book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2009: 18) advises ELT practitioners to say the words in random order (so that words with /w/ and /v/ may be articulated alternatively) for the students to repeat them again. Furthermore, the authors of the teacher's book allude to the fact that the discrimination of /w/ and /v/ is particularly problematic for Austrian learners of English, which has also been found by Wieden & Nemser (1991: 63). For a more detailed account of learners' problems with consonants see chapter 4.3.2.

Clearly, the activity under consideration is not an implicit pronunciation exercise, though the students are not confronted with phonetic transcription or other typical elements of explicit phonological instruction. However, this must not necessarily be seen as a criticism of the task: As mentioned earlier both implicit and explicit have their place in a general EFL curriculum. A listen-and-repeat activity as introduced in chapter 5.2.1, this exercise is undoubtedly explicit in its very nature – a task involving the mere repetition of words that are clearly not contextualised cannot be regarded as implicit, even though the use of phonetic transcription by the students is not required. The question that each teacher must ask themselves is whether they would like to do this exercise quickly without focusing too much on the intricacies of pronunciation (which is surely an option, given the fact that there are only limited instructions or suggestions available), or if they would like to make it even more explicit and adapt the task. This could be done, for example, by reading out the words in random order and letting the students indicate the initial sound in phonemic script, without using the book or CD.

In sum, this activity is certainly an extremely useful one, especially for Austrian learners, who usually have difficulties pronouncing these two sounds correctly. Using a traditional listen-and-repeat exercise for sound discrimination is, according to the literature (Kelly 2002 and Pennington 1996), an appropriate and reasonable way of raising awareness for this pair of sounds and of improving the learners' articulation of the sounds. As mentioned in section 6.1, according to McGrath (2002: 18-19), effective teaching materials are always based on the students' needs and take a number of learner factors (e.g. age range, first language, etc.) into account. Apparently, this is the case with the activity in question; however, teachers might feel the need to make changes on the methodological side of this

exercise, ultimately depending on the objective of the lesson, i.e. the extent to which learners should be confronted with sound discrimination.

## 6.2.2 MORE! 3 Enriched course – Activity 2: word stress



### Sounds right

**Put the words in the correct column. Then listen, check and repeat.**



amazing  
fantastic

ambulance  
horrible

dangerous  
hospital

exciting  
scientist

■ ■ ■ (e.g. <u>cro</u> codile)	■ ■ ■ (e.g. exp <u>en</u> sive)
1 .....	1 .....
2 .....	2 .....
3 .....	3 .....
4 .....	4 .....

This task (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009a: 35) centres on the suprasegmental feature of word stress. Unlike the previous exercise, the activity above does not involve working on individual sounds, but goes beyond the phonemic and minimal-pair levels to make learners assign stress patterns (either Ooo or oOo) to three-syllable words. The instructions tell students to write the given words in the column with the correct stress pattern, and subsequently they are asked to listen to the CD recording, check their answers and repeat the words. Since they are very clearly formulated, the instructions should be understood without any problems, i.e. comprehensibility issues are unlikely. The square next to the CD symbol indicates that this exercise is of medium difficulty, probably evaluated as such by the authors because it is an activity dealing with more than mere sound discrimination.

The teacher's book repeats the instructions that can be found in the student's book again in German, but suggests more than only one repetition of the words once the learners have put them into the correct column and listened to the solution. According to the authors, this is supposed to ensure that students know how to stress all the items from this selection of three-syllable words (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2009: 25).

Although this exercise does not involve any really technical linguistic vocabulary, it is still an explicit pronunciation task. The traditional methods of drilling and 'listen and repeat'

are obviously part of this activity, which, of course, does not make it an ineffective exercise per se; however, as will be shown in the following, there is a clear bias towards explicit pronunciation teaching in *MORE!* 3. If teachers wanted to adapt this task to make it more implicit, providing context in the form of sentences could be an option. Alternatively, students could be asked to find meaningful sentences (or even write short paragraphs) including the word(s) in question.

When investigating the pronunciation of Austrian learners of English, Wieden & Nemser (1991: 231-234) have discovered that the students' mastery of word stress patterns is different depending on the stage of foreign-language learning or level of language proficiency. Apparently, native speakers of German have a tendency towards transferring L1 word-stress patterns into English; hence, exercises such as this need to be part of TEFL in an Austrian school context. Their inclusion in the *MORE!* series therefore seems more than justified.

As mentioned earlier, Tomlinson (1999: 11-12, referred to in McGrath 2002: 21) also states that in order for teaching materials to be evaluated as effective or successful, they need to take local criteria into account, e.g. the role of the students' L1 in the learning process. Despite not being an overly communicative task without adaptation, the activity above could still be seen as effective, as it is designed to meet the special needs of Austrian learners.

### 6.2.3 *MORE! 3 Enriched course* – Activity 3: sentence stress

#### **Sounds right**



- 8** Listen to the sentences and mark the stressed words.  
Then say the sentences yourself.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1</b> If you <u>break</u> a <u>mirror</u> , you'll <u>have</u> <u>bad</u> <u>luck</u> . | <b>4</b> If you see a magpie, you'll get bad news. |
| <b>2</b> If you kill a spider, you'll have bad luck.                                       | <b>5</b> If you close your eyes and make a wish,   |
| <b>3</b> If you don't leave a hole, the ghosts<br>won't be happy.                          | your wish will come true.                          |

The pronunciation task included in Unit 6 (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009a: 50) is another one focusing on prosodic elements, namely sentence stress. Students are asked to indicate what the stressed words in the given sentences are while listening to the recording on CD. As a

second step, the learners should repeat the sentences with the correct stress pattern. The instructions for this exercise use simple imperatives and should not pose a problem to the students; however, similar to the activity presented previously, the linguistic concept of ‘stress’ must be clear in order for them to successfully complete the task. According to the authors of *MORE! 3 Enriched course*, this exercise is a particularly demanding one, which can be seen by the star underneath the CD symbol next to the activity. This assessment by Gerngross, Puchta et al. may be due to the notion that sentence stress is often seen as being a rather complex element of English phonology.

As a slight adaptation of the original task, the teacher’s book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2009: 32) suggests pair work among the students after the CD recording has been played to them. They should alternately read the sentences to each other, mind the different sentence-stress patterns, and then repeat the sentences again. Obviously, this adaptation does not change the fact that in essence, this activity is again a traditional and explicit listen-and-repeat exercise. For the sole purpose of introducing the concept of sentence stress and raising awareness in the learners, this activity can certainly be seen as effective.

Although the sentences provide meaningful context (associated with the topic of the unit, i.e. superstitions) and perfectly connect to the grammar point introduced in this unit (i.e. the first conditional), there is no sign of connected speech as deemed essential in communicative tasks. In fact, one could argue that the marking of the stressed words in the book makes the exercise even more explicit in its task design. If the teacher wanted their students to practice sentence stress in longer stretches of speech, working with dialogues would surely be more productive and would probably have a longer-lasting impact on the learners’ language proficiency.


McGrath (2002: 60) maintains that every ‘good’ activity must be relevant for the attainment of the lesson’s objective. Specific short- and long-term objectives are stated in the *MORE! 3* teacher’s book, whilst more general language goals are formulated in the national curricula provided by the Austrian ministry of education (BMBWK 2000, BMBWK 2004).

The question here is whether the mastery of sentence stress can be the main aim of a lesson in which *MORE! 3 Enriched course* is used as the only source of practice material for pronunciation. As this appears highly unrealistic, it is the teacher who needs to decide to what

extent sentence stress will be dealt with in the lesson. If formulated as the main objective, sentence stress must undoubtedly be introduced and practised with additional materials – solely using the activity under consideration would surely be inadequate. On the other hand, if sentence stress is merely seen as an additional lesson objective, this exercise with its basic introduction of the very notion of sentence prosody might prove sufficient. It seems that the mere raising of awareness for the concept of sentence stress would be a feasible objective in relation to this activity.

#### 6.2.4 *MORE! 3 Enriched course* – Activity 4: /ɒ/ vs. /ɔ:/

**Sounds right** /ɒ/ vs. /ɔ:/

 **10 Listen and tick.**

	/ɒ/	/ɔ:/		/ɒ/	/ɔ:/
<b>1</b> lot	✓		<b>4</b> hot		
<b>2</b> caught		✓	<b>5</b> got		
<b>3</b> thought			<b>6</b> saw		

The fourth pronunciation exercise of the selection from *MORE! 3 Enriched course* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009a: 62) is concerned with the differentiation of /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/. Students are only asked to listen to the recording and make a tick in the column with the correct sound; no speech production is required from the learners, which renders this task a seemingly mechanical activity. The students' ability to discriminate between the long and short 'o'-sound is tested in this exercise, which is simply introduced by two imperatives ("Listen and tick.") and, more importantly, involves no speaking practice at all.

However, the teacher's book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2009: 38) refers to possible adaptations and additions to this activity: Teachers are advised to familiarise the learners with the concept of vowel length, and after having completed the actual task, they should read out the words but not exaggerate the length of the vowels. Even though these changes to the original activity appear sensible, it is again a very traditional, mechanical and explicit pronunciation exercise. As no meaningful context whatsoever is provided, this task is, at best (when using the suggestions from the teacher's book), a listen-and-repeat task.



Generally, pronunciation tasks centring on vowel length are particularly important for Austrian learners of English, as was discovered by Wieden & Nemser (1991: 56-58). According to them, the ‘high categories’ such as /i:/ and /ɪ/ need a special focus in the language class, but also the ‘lower categories’, consisting of, for example, /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/, must be dealt with in EFL lessons. It can therefore be said that it was a sensible decision by Gerngross, Puchta et al. to include at least one activity on long and short vowel sounds in *MORE! 3*. However, no other exercise in the student’s book deals with the feature of vowel length or with other vowels in general, even though Austrian learners are known to have problems in these areas of English pronunciation. This very narrow focus of *MORE! 3* must surely be criticised.

Since the exercise in question can hardly be considered communicative, an adaptation might be deemed necessary by the teacher. An option with undoubtedly beneficial effects would be to turn this activity into a collaborative poem-writing task, as suggested by Kelly (2002: 43-44). Such an exercise involves active language production by the learners, and through the process of writing a rhyming poem, they are faced with phonological issues. Hence, an adaptation like this would also further develop an evidently explicit pronunciation task to a more effective, implicit one.

However, the task might be adequate as a quick listen-and-tick exercise if only little time is available for pronunciation matters in a given lesson. As with the previous activity, it depends on the formulation of the overall lesson aims whether additional materials or task adaptation are required (McGrath 2002: 60). Nevertheless, this does not change anything about the fact that the activity under consideration here is neither an implicit nor a communicative pronunciation exercise.

### 6.2.5 *MORE! 3 Enriched course* – Activity 5: weak sound /ə/

#### Sounds right



**II Listen and repeat the sentences. Pay attention to the weak sound of the underlined parts.**



- 1 We aren't allowed to play in the street.
- 2 I'm not allowed to get a tattoo.
- 3 My brother and sister aren't allowed to go out.
- 4 We can't watch television after eleven.
- 5 We're leaving to go and live in another town.

The fifth and last activity of the task selection from *MORE! 3 Enriched course* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009a: 75) is concerned with a crucial aspect of English pronunciation, namely the weak sound 'schwa' /ə/. Again, students are confronted with a traditional listen-and-repeat exercise, and they are asked to "[p]ay attention to the weak sound of the underlined parts", which is a very vague and unspecific instruction. Instead, the authors could have opted for, for instance, "Make sure you pronounce the weak sound in the underlined parts correctly". This change of the wording of the instructions would refer more specifically to the productive rather than the receptive part of the exercise.

In this task, the students do not need to identify the 'schwa'-sound themselves, as the relevant sounds or syllables have been marked for them. Alternatively, teachers could raise the difficulty level of this activity by providing the sentences without any underlined parts so that the learners need to spot where the weak sound needs to be placed.

As a viable method of practising the 'schwa', the teacher's book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2009: 42) suggests drilling. Teachers are advised to let the learners repeat the sentences several times in order to ensure prosody and sound articulation are correct. As with the other pronunciation activities in *MORE! 3*, no context is given, which must be a fundamental consideration when trying to adapt or improve the exercise. As the sentences in this task all centre on the topic of rules and regulations, students could, for example, be asked to write a short text about rules at home or come up with a dialogue between them and their parents. In the following, they should indicate where the weak sounds in their own sentences are and mind these unstressed syllables when reading out their stories or dialogues.

In their survey of English pronunciation among Austrian learners, Wieden & Nemser (1991: 57) have found that the 'schwa'-sound /ə/ is often lengthened to make it a full vowel,

so apparently, EFL students in Austria need specially-tailored activities that make them aware of the intricacies of the weak sound and give them enough opportunities to practise its articulation in context. The exercise in question can hardly be seen as meeting these demands. Adapting the task in the way described above would make it more communicative, less dull, and certainly more effective as regards the outcome of the lesson.

As already mentioned in section 6.1, practical relevance is, in the eyes of McGrath (2002: 34), a prerequisite for any activity to be included in a course book. Since Wieden & Nemser (1991: 57) maintain that the ‘schwa’-sound is particularly relevant for German L1 speakers, the inclusion of such an exercise is certainly a plus of *MORE! 3*. However, considering the seemingly anachronistic methodology of the task, which only involves listening and repeating individual sentences that are not at all contextualised, its effectiveness must surely be questioned. Yet, with the adaptations suggested above, the activity might become more communicative and beneficial for the learners.

## 6.2.6 *MORE! 4 Enriched course* – Activity 1: elision

**Sounds right** Elision

 **4** Listen to the dialogue. Pay attention to the underlined parts. Then listen and repeat.

<b>Alan</b>	I'd <u>like to</u> visit <u>Dublin</u> .	<b>Chris</b>	Because it's <u>hot there</u> . Where would you <u>like to</u> go?
<b>Brenda</b>	Why?	<b>Brenda</b>	Guess!
<b>Alan</b>	My friend went <u>there</u> . He loved it. It <u>must be</u> a great <u>city</u> .	<b>Chris</b>	I haven't <u>got</u> a clue.
<b>Chris</b>	I'd rather go to Spain.	<b>Brenda</b>	Nowhere. I don't <u>like travelling</u> .
<b>Brenda</b>	Why Spain?		

The first pronunciation activity in *MORE! 4 Enriched course* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 8) deals with elision, a feature of connected speech. Students should become aware of this phenomenon by listening to the CD recording and minding the underlined parts of the sentences. Then, they are asked to listen again and reproduce the lines of the dialogue using their knowledge of elision that they have acquired through this exercise. The instructions are easily comprehensible, and unlike the task in *MORE! 3* analysed earlier, the “[p]ay attention” imperative may be understood here as referring to both the receptive and the productive phase

of this activity. A reason for this might be its position between the two other imperative sentences. Interestingly, the authors believe this task to be of medium difficulty (square symbol), although elision is a rather complex phonological feature, as, for instance, pointed out by Roach (2000: 142), who not only defines the term but also questions its relevance for foreign-language learners:

The nature of **elision** may be stated quite simply: under certain circumstances sounds disappear; one might express this in more technical language by saying that in certain circumstances a phoneme may be realised as **zero**, or have **zero realisation** or be **deleted**. As with assimilation, elision is typical of rapid, casual speech. Producing elisions is something which foreign learners do not need to learn to do, but it is important for them to be aware that when native speakers of English talk to each other, quite a number of phonemes that the foreigner might expect to hear are not actually pronounced.

It can therefore be said that this activity is effective in terms of making learners aware of the phenomenon. Since they only have to repeat the given sentences and not produce their own or find instances of elision in any other text, the task should not be too difficult for them but still provide enough opportunity for practice and experimenting. Though elision might not be relevant for the learners' language production, it surely is for the improvement of their receptive skills. As explained in section 6.1, this is what makes the activity under discussion an effective task according to McGrath (2002: 18-19), who states that relevance and learner needs are among the top priorities when it comes to the selection of useful teaching materials.

The teacher's book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2011: 14) might prove particularly helpful for EFL practitioners who are not familiar with a precise definition of elision, as it advises teachers to make the learners work together and have them present the dialogues to the class. Gerngross, Kamauf et al. also maintain that it is necessary for the teacher to introduce the feature of elision by saying that the underlined parts of the sentences in the dialogues are deleted or at least not stressed. Hence, students know what to expect when listening to the CD recording.

Although the activity under consideration may be criticised on grounds of communicativeness and explicitness (for instance, learners do not need to produce their own sentences), any adaptations that would require the students to actively identify elision or even find examples themselves would certainly be too challenging for 4<sup>th</sup>-year learners of EFL. In light of this, the pronunciation exercise on elision can be described as being definitely beneficial for the publication's target group.

## 6.2.7 *MORE! 4 Enriched course* – Activity 2: final consonants



### **Sounds right** Final consonants

#### **12 Listen and repeat.**

- |                       |             |                             |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>1</b> road – wrote | had – hat   | <b>2</b> Ride on the right! |
| cab – cap             | made – mate | I made some new mates.      |
| ride – right          | bag – back  | He had a hat on his head.   |
|                       |             | Put the bag back!           |

The second pronunciation activity of the selection from *MORE! 4 Enriched course* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 27) is concerned with the correct articulation of final consonants, in particular /d/ vs. /t/, /b/ vs. /p/, and /g/ vs. /k/. Both the receptive as well as the productive differentiation between these lenis and fortis plosive sounds are central in this activity. The instructions are simply two verbs in the imperative (“Listen and repeat.”), which the learners have become used to from completing pronunciation tasks featured in the previous textbooks of the *MORE!* series. Moreover, the exercise is divided into two parts; part one is an explicit sound discrimination task, whereas part two is more implicit and requires the students to read or recite a poem with the correct word-final consonants.

Only three lines of further instructions for teachers are provided in the teacher’s book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2011: 24), where the authors advise teachers to ask their students to articulate the final consonants in the word pairs and the rhyme (parts one and two of the task) clearly but not exaggeratedly. The circle underneath the CD symbol indicates the exercise is a simple activity that both low- and high-achievers should be able to master without major difficulty. Whether this is really the case can surely be questioned, most of all since Wieden & Nemser (1991: 63) have identified the articulation of voiced and voiceless consonants to be a vital issue in Austrian ELT contexts (see below).


In order to expand on the issue of word-final consonants, learners could be asked to write a short poem or rhyme themselves, for example by using words other than the ones given – such an addition to the original exercise would certainly raise the general level of difficulty of the task. Pennington (1996: 75-84), referred to in chapter 5.2.1, also suggests story and poem writing when working on the pronunciation of consonant sounds.

Wieden & Nemser (1991: 63) have found that Austrian learners have a tendency towards dropping the distinction between fortis and lenis consonants, which – for instance in the case of the words given as examples in the exercise in question – can lead to fundamental intelligibility issues. To counteract this tendency, activities especially focusing on this voiced/voiceless distinction need to be used in Austrian EFL classes. Even though the task under consideration could be made more communicative by asking the students to produce stories or poems themselves rather than merely repeating a sample rhyme, its inclusion in an EFL course book apparently shows that material developers are aware of what the needs of the target-group learners are.


The task introduced here is surely not ineffective or unproductive; however, in order to cover the issue of word-final consonants more extensively, additions to the original exercise and sample words are clearly necessary. Should a teacher be in the situation that only limited time is available for this phonological feature, the activity under discussion provides the most essential information about and at least some opportunity to practice the articulation of final consonants.

### 6.2.8 *MORE! 4 Enriched course* – Activity 3: /ə/

**Sounds right** /ə/

 **2 Listen. Pay attention to the underlined sounds.**

Don't want to be a secretary.  
A waiter's life is not for me.  
A flight attendant, that's my dream.  
 Be an accountant? No – I'd scream!

 **3 Listen again and say the rhyme.**

Unlike the exercise in *MORE! 3 Enriched course*, analysed in chapter 6.1.5 of this thesis, the activity above (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 38) is evidently more contextualised. It also centres on the 'schwa'-sound /ə/, but since the sample sentences are all part of a rhyme about jobs, the task seems generally more communicative. The first part of this exercise is purely receptive; students are only asked to listen to the rhyme and mind the /ə/-sounds. Part two, on


the other hand, requires the learners to produce language themselves, though they do not need to create their own poem; rather, they should repeat the original rhyme with the correct pronunciation of the ‘schwa’. Both parts are rated as simple activities, but the question remains why the authors decided to split the instructions and consequently also the whole task. Alternative instructions such as, “Listen to the rhyme and pay attention to the weak sound. Then listen again and repeat the rhyme with the correct pronunciation of the underlined parts”, would integrate the second part of the activity into the first one without changing anything about the initial methodological design of the task and provide the learners with the necessary meta-language.

The teacher’s book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2011: 30) too treats this exercise as two separate tasks. The authors suggest teachers ask students after playing the CD recording what they have noticed about the pronunciation of the underlined parts. This would reverse the roles of teacher and student: The learners should inductively come to the conclusion that the rhyme includes a considerable number of weak sounds and unstressed syllables, which should then be explained to the teacher. Ideally, no or only little input from the teacher is necessary in order for the students to become aware of the use of the ‘schwa’-sound. For the second part of the exercise, the teacher’s book advises EFL practitioners to have the learners work in pairs and read the short poem to each other. The teacher’s role here would be to monitor and – if necessary – rectify the students’ pronunciation. The proposed methodology for the first task is a particularly communicative way of introducing the /ə/-sound, as it is the learners who discover the very nature of the ‘schwa’ by themselves and need to explain it to their teacher, which means they are always actively involved throughout the activity.

As referred to earlier in chapter 6.1.5, the weak sound /ə/ is often problematic for Austrian learners of EFL (Wieden & Nemser 1991: 57). It appears that German-L1 speakers have a propensity towards lengthening the ‘schwa’ and thereby making the syllable of which it is a part a potentially stressed syllable. As this could easily lead to intelligibility issues, the need of practising /ə/ is obvious, which means that teaching the weak sound is a highly relevant aspect of EFL in German-speaking countries, and therefore renders it an essential part of any pronunciation curriculum. However, intelligibility as understood by advocates of ELF teaching cannot be a governing principle of designing a pronunciation course. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the Austrian national curriculum requires educators to teach a standard variety of the target language but not any generally intelligible variant.

This is also underpinned by McGrath (2002: 20-21), who holds that learner needs, relevance and syllabus are among the most important considerations when selecting effective teaching and practice materials (see section 6.1). In spite of the fact that the students do not need to produce a rhyme on their own but solely repeat the given example, the activity under discussion is undeniably more communicative and implicit than many others, most of all if the methodological tips in the teacher's book are followed.

### 6.2.9 *MORE! 4 Enriched course* – Activity 4: word-initial /p/



**Sounds right** /p/ at the beginning of words

**3 Listen and say the sentences as quickly as possible.**

Young people use pocket money to pay for piercings.  
Parents aren't prepared to pay the price – or give permission!

The fourth activity of the *MORE! 4 Enriched course* selection (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 69) focuses on the articulation of the word-initial plosive /p/. In particular, the sound's fortis nature and its aspirated pronunciation play a major role here. The instructions for the students are very precise and unambiguous: The learners are only asked to listen to the recording on CD and repeat the sentences as quickly as they can. The authors of the student's book rate this exercise as simple, which means it should be an easy activity for both low- and high-achieving learners.

No substantial additional information or advice can be found in the teacher's book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2011: 45). Pair work in the practice phase is suggested, and teachers should pay attention to the clear articulation of the plosive at the beginning of the words. The second part of the instructions in the student's book indicates that those sentences can also be read as tongue twisters. This method has also been recommended by Pennington (1996: 77-78), referred to in chapter 5.2.1 of the thesis at hand. Nevertheless, one point of criticism that concerns Pennington's suggestion as well as other explicit pronunciation exercises is the apparent lack of context. This, of course, also applies to the activity under consideration, which only provides two single-line sentences that contain a significant number of word-initial /p/-sounds but which are not connected or related to each other in terms of topic or grammar.



As referred to earlier in this thesis, the distinction between fortis and lenis consonants might be considerably difficult for Austrian learners of EFL (Wieden & Nemser 1991: 63). Although the task design appears simple, low-achieving students in particular might find the activity under discussion challenging. Likewise, aspiration, i.e. “a period during which air escapes through the vocal folds, making a sound like **h**” (Roach 2000: 34), is also a feature that frequently poses a problem especially to Austrian speakers of German. Although neither the student’s nor the teacher’s book specifically refer to raising awareness for aspiration as an aim of the activity in question, the issue must certainly be addressed. Since *MORE! 4* does not offer any information about aspiration, relevant background knowledge must thus be provided by the teacher. This is surely a valid point of criticism about this task, since one might get the impression that this activity was only included to fill page 69 of the student’s book rather than to improve the learners’ phonological skills as regards word-initial plosives and aspiration. If the exercise were expanded by the authors to contain additional information and render a more elaborate task design, it could certainly be evaluated as useful.

In order to increase the communicativeness of the task, learners could, for instance, be asked to write short stories, poems, dialogues or plays, which would require students to use their productive language skills (writing, speaking) instead of merely parroting sentences from a CD recording. These stories, poems or plays could then be read out or performed in front of the class. Similar lesson ideas have also been presented by Pennington (1996: 78-84). Unlike originally proposed by the course-book authors, an adaptation like this would involve the active use of a number of linguistic sub-skills, provide the students with opportunities to speak and thereby allow for the improvement of their language ability on several levels. If teachers wish to include more implicit pronunciation activities in their classes, altering the original instructions in the aforementioned way would surely prove beneficial for the lesson’s outcome.

McGrath’s (2002: 20-21) indicators for material selection (learner needs, relevance, syllabus, etc.) have been repeatedly mentioned in previous chapters. These points apply to the task under consideration as well, though its success is ultimately dependent on its actual realisation in the classroom and the kind of additions or adaptations made by the teacher.

### 6.2.10 *MORE! 4 Enriched course* – Activity 5: stress

#### **Sounds right**



#### **12 Listen and mark the stress in the words.**



meaningless

illegal

disagree

impossible

beautiful

irregular

incorrect

misunderstand



#### **13 Listen again and repeat.**



The last pronunciation activity included in *MORE! 4 Enriched course* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 113) deals with the prosodic element of word stress. Rated as an exercise of medium difficulty, part one of the task involves listening to the CD recording and subsequently marking the stressed syllables in the words given. To illustrate how this should be done, an example is provided. In part two, students have to listen again and repeat the words with the correct pronunciation. The instructions do not cause comprehensibility issues, as only simple imperative forms of the verbs are used.

Additional information and advice is offered by the teacher's book (Gerngross, Kamauf et al. 2011: 63). Teachers should "test" what the learners already know about the pronunciation of the adjectives by writing the base form of the words without any affixes on the board. Students are then asked to add prefixes to the adjectives to make them mean the opposite. (Although not mentioned in the teacher's book, this can, of course, also be done with suffixes.) After this introductory exercise, the 'grammar box' about affixes given in the student's book (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 113) should be discussed with the learners. According to the teacher's book, it would be sensible to start with the actual task only after this opening activity. For the second part, the authors recommend pair work so that the learners can repeat the words to each other and receive corrective feedback from their partner.

Divided into a receptive and a productive part, this task is, in essence, again a classical listen-and-repeat exercise which does not require students to produce their own language – the words they are expected to repeat are all given. A possible adaptation that potentially increases the communicativeness of the task would be to have the students brainstorm even more adjectives that can be affixed, which they would then have to pronounce without the

help of a CD recording. Naturally, this would also promote the role of the teacher, since they would consequently be the exclusive resource that can be queried concerning the correct pronunciation and word stress. Furthermore, if combined with a writing assignment as suggested by Pennington (1996) and Kelly (2002), the activity could easily be turned into a more implicit exercise for phonological instruction that would also foster language skills other than pronunciation.

As Wieden & Nemser (1991: 234) maintain that Austrian learners' English-L2 word stress is influenced by L1 stress patterns for a considerable amount of time, pronunciation tasks focusing on this suprasegmental feature are vital in order to improve phonological competence. The inclusion of such an exercise in *MORE! 4 Enriched course* clearly shows that the authors are aware of this fact; however, the traditional methodology and the activity's explicit nature can surely be criticised.

### **6.3 Task progression in *MORE! 3* and *4 Enriched course***

Within the individual books of the series, no evaluation or assessment of the progression of the tasks is possible, since all the activities centre on different aspects of English phonology. However, when analysing the tasks in *MORE! 3* in comparison with those in *MORE! 4*, it becomes evident that some of the exercises in *MORE! 4* have been designed to build on the knowledge that the students should have acquired in their third year of learning English. The same is true for *MORE! 3* in relation to *MORE! 2* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009c); both include, for example, exercises dealing with the differentiation between /w/ and /v/. The fact that there is no revision of pronunciation features within one book of the series must be criticised, especially because this is not the case with the various grammar points that are presented. For instance, Unit 2 of *MORE! 4* introduces the past simple tense, and the grammar section of Unit 6 focuses on the revision of the past simple.

*MORE! 3 Enriched course* includes seven pronunciation exercises altogether, two of which deal with suprasegmental features; the rest is concerned with segmental features and sound discrimination. A bias towards traditional teaching foci in phonological instruction is

therefore apparent. Similarly, *MORE! 4 Enriched course* has two out of seven pronunciation tasks centring on prosodic elements of English, whereas the others all deal with the articulation or differentiation of individual sounds. Interestingly, only two exercises on segmental features in *MORE! 3* have a corresponding task in *MORE! 4*: Unit 10 in *MORE! 3* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009a: 78) and Unit 9 in *MORE! 4* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 69) both include tasks on the articulation of word-initial /p/, and Unit 9 of *MORE! 3* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009a: 75) and Unit 5 in *MORE! 4* (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 38) each have an activity that centres on the ‘schwa’-sound.

The example sentences in both /p/-sound tasks can be read as tongue twisters – the only difference between the exercises is that only one longer sentence must be repeated in *MORE! 3*, while in the comparable activity in *MORE! 4*, two unconnected short sentences must be said as quickly as possible. Both from a linguistic-phonological and a pedagogical standpoint, speaking of progression would appear as an exaggeration. Rather, the activity in *MORE! 4* seems to be intended as a revision from what the learners already know from the previous school year. However, revising certain pronunciation features as late as after a full school year does not appear useful or effective and must therefore surely be called into question.

The same applies to the two exercises on the weak sound /ə/. In the third-year course book, five individual sentences without further context are given, whereas in the student’s book for year four, a rhyme is the basis for the activity. Although there is no difference between what the learners are asked to do in the exercises in terms of linguistic requirements, one could still say that the transition from individual sentences to connected speech in the form of a rhyme can be seen as progression.

Among the suprasegmental features, word stress is dealt with in both *MORE! 3* and *MORE! 4*. Here, task progression is obvious: While the exercise in the course book for year three (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009a: 35) only uses simple nouns and adjectives consisting of three syllables as sample words, the activity in the fourth-year student’s book (Gerngross, Puchta et al. 2009b: 113) relates to the grammar point of the respective unit and uses affixed verbs and adjectives as sample words. As assigning stress patterns to words with prefixes and suffixes is certainly more challenging than choosing between two patterns for three-syllable nouns and adjectives, progression is more than evident.

Overall however, the *MORE!* series seems to focus on revision rather than progression when it comes to pronunciation activities. Most of the tasks do not have a corresponding exercise in the succeeding course book, which might be an indication either for the lack of space available in textbooks or for the low priority given to phonological instruction by the authors in years three and four of EFL learning.

## 6.4 *LASER B1+* and *LASER B2*

*LASER B1+* is a course book originating from the UK which has been approbated by the Austrian Education Ministry for years 5 and 6 of general education in grammar schools (i.e. grades 9 and 10). With the emergence of new publications tailored to suit the requirements of the standardised Austrian school-leaving exam that students will take from 2015 onwards, however, it is to be expected that the schools' demand of EFL textbooks originating from foreign publishing houses will decrease considerably.

Used internationally as preparation material for the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE), *LASER B1+* comes with a CD-ROM that contains additional practice materials. Moreover, a workbook and a teacher's book – each accompanied by an audio CD with listening comprehension activities – are also part of the *LASER B1+* package of publications. Each of the 16 units in the book, which generally focus on different topical issues, includes a pronunciation exercise either dealing with a segmental or suprasegmental feature of English phonology. However, only two exercises focus on suprasegmentals, the fourteen others centre on individual sounds and sound discrimination – thus, a bias towards segmental features is apparent. Astoundingly, no activity centring on the pronunciation of diphthongs is included in *LASER B1+*.

The following pronunciation tasks are included in the *LASER B1+* student's book:

- /ɪ/ and /i:/ (Unit 1)
- /æ/ and /e/ (Unit 2)
- /ʌ/ (Unit 3)
- silent letters 1 (Unit 4)
- /ʒ/ (Unit 5)

- weak forms 1 (Unit 6)
- /k/, /g/ and /ŋ/ (Unit 7)
- /s/ and /z/ (Unit 8)
- /s/ and /ʃ/ (Unit 9)
- /ə/ (Unit 10)
- stress 1 (Unit 11)
- /ɑ:/, /ɔ:/ and /u:/ (Unit 12)
- silent letters 2 (Unit 13)
- stress 2 (Unit 14)
- /v/ and /əv/ (Unit 15)
- weak forms 2 (Unit 16)

A selection of five of these activities (three dealing with segmental, two with suprasegmental features) will be analysed in sections 6.4.1 to 6.4.5.

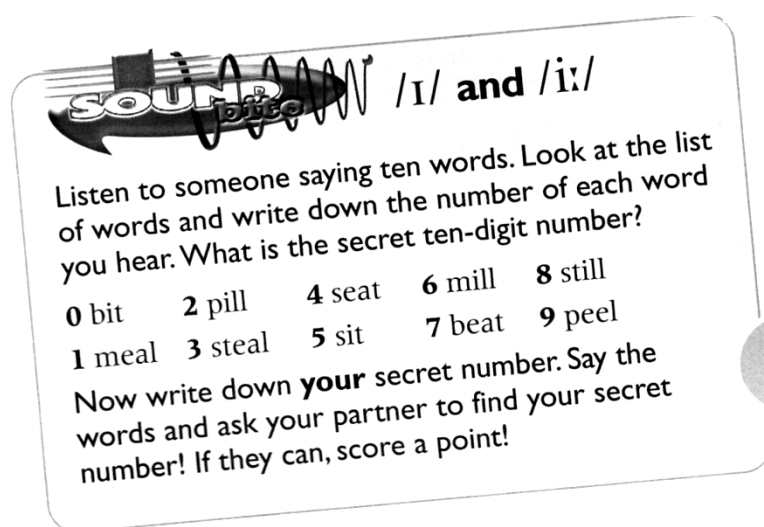
Unlike *LASER B1+*, the course book aimed at the following proficiency level, *LASER B2* (Mann & Taylore-Knowles 2008), does not include any pronunciation exercises at all. Although each of the twelve units has a speaking section with practice tasks for the FCE Speaking Paper, there seems to be no focus on phonological competence. In the *LASER B2* teacher's book (Brandt 2008: 19), however, reference is made to the grading of the speaking performance in the FCE:

[G]rades in four different categories:

- 1 Grammar and vocabulary
- 2 Discourse (ie ability to construct coherent, logical sentences)
- 3 Pronunciation
- 4 Communicative ability

Thus, it is obvious that pronunciation has to play a major role in the preparation for the FCE and in the exam itself. Astoundingly, none of the practice tasks for speaking in the *LASER B2* student's book mentions 'pronunciation' as an essential feature of a candidate's oral performance. Consequently, no analysis of pronunciation activities can be conducted, and section 6.5 on task progression must centre on exercises in *LASER B1+* only.

#### 6.4.1 *LASER B1+* – Activity 1: /ɪ/ and /i:/



The first pronunciation activity in *LASER B1+* (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 10) centres on the articulation of the sounds /ɪ/ and /i:/, and hence also vowel length. Unlike the examples from the *MORE!* series presented previously, this exercise greatly engages the learners, which is obvious from the instructions. The students have to find the “secret ten-digit number” by listening to the words and writing down their numbers in the correct order. The second part of the task asks the learners to work together with a partner, read the words to them in a different order and write down the new secret number. The instructions for both parts contain words and phrases with which the students should be familiar at lower-intermediate level; thus, no comprehension issues should be expected.

Before playing the game, however, the teacher’s book (Chapman 2008: 14) recommends having the students listen to the words at least once in order for them to become aware of the difference in vowel length. Although the second part of the activity clearly requires students to say the words with the correct pronunciation, the production of the sounds is not explicitly stated as an aim of the exercise. According to Chapman (2008: 14), the task’s objective is “to practise listening for the sounds /ɪ/ and /i:/”. Still, at lower-intermediate level and when doing both parts of the exercise, it would seem appropriate to add the correct articulation and production as further aims of the task.

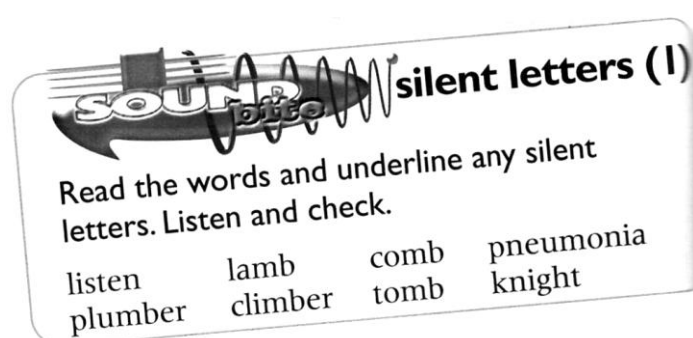
The activity under consideration is probably the most implicit pronunciation exercise of the ones presented so far. Even though the learners might need some explicit explanations

as to what they are expected to listen out for and what the difference between the sounds is, the overall task design with its game-playing notion is surely unlike many other activities for phonological instruction. Naturally, the exercise could be altered and adapted if the teacher decides that their students need more practice, but generally, the activity seems motivating and complete.

Vowel length is an issue in English phonological instruction internationally (cf. sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 on the ‘Lingua Franca Core’), which explains the inclusion of such an exercise in a publication that is intended for schools and language courses all over the world. As mentioned earlier, lengthening and shortening of vowel sounds may also prove problematic with Austrian learners of EFL. Wieden & Nemser (1991: 56) maintain that pronunciation issues occur especially in the ‘high categories’ of the vowel trapezoid, i.e. /i:/, /ɪ/, /u:/ and /ʊ/. In light of this, the task in question might be particularly effective in Austrian classrooms.

Using McGrath’s (2002: 32-33) criteria and checklist for first-glance material evaluation, it becomes evident that the activity introduced here fulfils age-specific criteria, “i.e. the suitability of the material (e.g. visuals, cognitive challenge) for the age-group for which it is intended”, as well as the criteria formulated for a task’s appeal to learners, i.e. layout, visuals, topics, and medium-term suitability (i.e. whether the material is likely to date). Since this exercise meets all these requirements, it appears to be a ‘good’ and productive task indeed.

#### 6.4.2 *LASER B1+* – Activity 2: silent letters 1





This task (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 36) is concerned with yet another feature of English pronunciation that none of the activities in *MORE! 3* or *4* deals with, namely silent letters, i.e. letters that do not stand for sounds or phonemes. Students are asked to read the words, underline the silent letters, listen to the CD recording, and then check their answers. The instructions consist of imperatives only and should not cause any comprehension problems. It is interesting, though, that the learners are not expected to pronounce the words themselves, similar to a self-study activity.

The teacher's book (Chapman 2008: 40), however, advises teachers to elicit the correct answers by having the students say the words, which gives the teacher a chance to provide corrective feedback on the learners' pronunciation. The aim of the exercise is stated by Chapman (2008: 40) in the teacher's book, i.e. raising student awareness of silent letters. This can surely be achieved with the activity under consideration, though, again, this objective could be extended to include receptive as well as productive phonological skills.

In contrast to the task introduced in chapter 6.4.1, this exercise is obviously explicit in nature: The sample words come without any context and no instance of connected speech is provided. If teachers wish to use these sample words in an implicit pronunciation activity, a number of speaking or writing tasks would be conceivable. Drama and role-play, as suggested by Kendrick (1997), could be used as well as poem or story writing, which are recommended by Pennington (1996) and Kelly (2002), and have been referred to earlier in the analyses of other exercises.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, silent letters have not been at the centre of any pronunciation task investigated until now. One may get the impression that silent letters are no traditional subject of phonological instruction – none of the works cited include a section or exercise on silent letters, and the issue is not specifically mentioned as a potential problem area of Austrian learners by Wieden & Nemser (1991). It could be argued that this is the case because no actual articulation is required, and because those words that include letters which are omitted when pronounced need to be learnt individually. In addition, researchers in the field of phonology and pronunciation use the sound level as the basis of their analyses, not the level of graphemes.

Nevertheless, the non-articulation of silent letters is a highly relevant issue for learners of EFL, which makes the activity under consideration a relevant and useful task in

the categorisation by McGrath (2002: 54-55). Its suggested methodology, however, might be adapted depending on the objectives the teacher would like to follow in their lesson.

### 6.4.3 *LASER B1+* – Activity 3: weak forms 1

**weak forms (1)**

Some words are pronounced differently when they aren't stressed. Listen to how we say the underlined words in these sentences.

*and* I get a bit scared when there's lots of thunder and lightning.

*an* Don't forget to take an umbrella.

*as* It's not as cold as yesterday, is it?

*at* It started snowing at 10 o'clock and didn't stop.

*can* If it's warm, we can go to the beach.

*for* It seems like it's been raining for days.

Now try saying the sentences in the same way. If necessary, listen again.

As was the case with the two course books for lower-secondary level, *LASER B1+* also features exercises on weak forms, one of which is the task above (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 54). The first part of the instructions is an introductory sentence that introduces the phenomenon of weak sounds in plain English. Part two of the instructions contains imperatives, asking the students to first listen to the words in the given sentences and then repeat the sentences in the same way. Since 'schwa'-sounds might be seen as an especially elusive feature of English phonology, the activity offers the learners to listen to the recording again if this is deemed necessary.

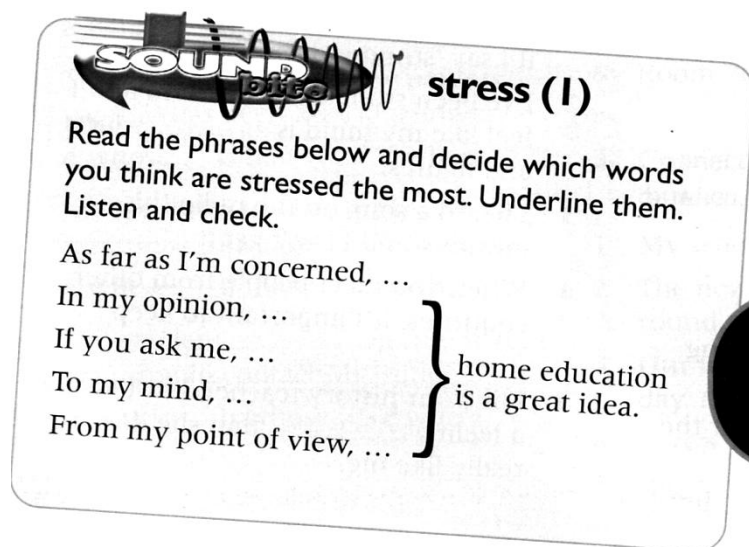
The articulation of weak forms in function words such as ‘and’, ‘as’ and ‘for’ might be considered essential for EFL students. Although Jenkins (2000: 146-147) holds that articulating weak forms as strong forms does not impair intelligibility, Jenner’s core of International English (1989: 4, quoted in Jenkins: 125-126) includes the /ə/-sound, probably because unimportant items can be weakened in order to highlight a more important one – an argument not necessarily accepted by Jenkins (2000: 146). Her doubts could be seen as confirmed by the fact that weak forms are a characteristic of British English.

Nevertheless, the argument of highlighting items is still a very strong one in this debate, and the fact that exercises on weak forms are still included in modern-day EFL publications may be seen as an indication that material developers and other linguists do not fully agree with Jenkins. Since the function words referred to above do not carry as much semantic meaning as nouns, verbs or adjectives (and can therefore be pronounced as weak syllables to shift the focus of the utterance to more important parts of speech), it appears reasonable to include such tasks in course books for foreign learners of English.

As regards task design, the exercise under discussion is a listen-and-repeat exercise, though not as traditional as some of the activities analysed previously, which can be seen by its using whole sentences (though they are not contextualised) as sample language material and the separate listing of the words that are pronounced as weak syllables in connected speech. Declaring this activity as an implicit pronunciation task would certainly seem exaggerated; however, it shows traces of such exercises, i.e. presenting the phenomenon with (admittedly limited) context in full sample sentences. Still, its overall methodology justifies its classification as an explicit pronunciation task, and the symbol of the task series (a sound wave) suggests that the ‘Soundbite’ activities are not even intended to be implicit after all. A feasible addition to the exercises, which would surely engage the students and provide a basis for further follow-up activities, would be to ask the learners to find their own sentences including the words given.

This exercise certainly supports teaching and learning of the articulation of the /ə/-sound in connected speech, which is a key criterion for the selection of effective and productive materials according to McGrath (2002: 37). Nevertheless, in order to introduce the feature of weak sounds in its entirety, additional tasks and methods would be necessary, as well as further input and meta-linguistic information from the teacher.

#### 6.4.4 *LASER B1+* – Activity 4: stress 1



The task under consideration here (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 100) is the first of two activities in *LASER B1+* dealing with sentence stress. Imperative structures tell the learners what they are expected to do in this task: read the opinion phrases, underline the words stressed most, and then listen to the recording and check the answers. Five opinion phrases are given, four of which to form grammatically correct sentences using “home education is a great idea” as their continuation.


In the teacher’s book, Chapman (2008: 104) suggests dividing the class into pairs and having the learners decide together which word is stressed most in the sample sentences. Other than that, the instructions for the teacher follow the student’s instructions. At the end of this section in the teacher’s book, however, the author refers to Part 3 of the FCE Speaking Paper, where the learners may find these opinion phrases particularly helpful. The teacher’s book does not provide any ideas for changes to the original activity, but a possible adaptation of the task would be to include other phrases or discursive devices and ask the students to find the most prominent words there.

If a speaking part were added to the exercise, it would definitely make the whole task more communicative and change it into a more implicit pronunciation activity. Learners could be asked to discuss controversial topics or engage in role-play, as suggested by Kendrick (1997). This would ensure that not only one sub-skill is furthered, but, with reference to the discussions about the format of the ‘new Matura’, learners could also be

familiarised with the oral parts of the school-leaving exam, especially the so-called ‘paired activity’.

The question whether the task is relevant and can be used to meet learner needs (cf. McGrath 2002: 20-21), can be answered affirmatively: Opinion phrases and their correct stress patterns are basic requirements of any speaker of a foreign language when having to cope with face-to-face communication and expressing one’s viewpoint. As with many pronunciation activities introduced so far, the task under discussion can only serve as a starting point for more comprehensive work on sentence stress, though it is certainly productive and effective when done in the language classroom – even more so if additional tasks and materials are used.

#### 6.4.5 *LASER B1+* – Activity 5: stress 2

 **stress (2)**

Underline the syllable you think is stressed most in the words in each set. Listen and check.  
The first word is an example.

1 <u>ph</u> otograph	phot <u>o</u> grapher	phot <u>o</u> graphic	2 athlete	ath <u>e</u> tic	3 vict <u>o</u> ry	vict <u>o</u> rious
4 fam <u>o</u> s	infam <u>o</u> s	5 sci <u>e</u> nce	sci <u>e</u> ntific	6 conc <u>e</u> trate	conc <u>e</u> ntration	

The fifth and last activity of the selection from *LASER B1+* (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 126) is the continuation of the previously introduced exercise on stress. This task, however, focuses on word rather than sentence stress, and uses six sets of words from the same word families as examples. The learners are asked to guess and underline the most prominent syllable, and subsequently listen to the recording and check their answers. These instructions are formulated in plain-English imperatives and surely do not cause any comprehension issues.

No additional lesson ideas are presented in the teacher’s book (Chapman 2008: 130), although teachers are advised to allow pair work for the first phase of the activity, which is not explicitly mentioned in the original task instructions. Moreover, the author recommends eliciting the correct answers from the students after playing the listening text and thereby providing corrective feedback whenever necessary. Since the exercise does not involve

working with full sentences in context, a potential adaptation of the activity would be to let the learners find example sentences that include the words in question. It would undoubtedly be reasonable to have them come up with more than only one sentence for each word in order to make sure the expressions are used in an appropriate context and to ensure the pronunciation is correct also in connected speech.

As mentioned in sections 4.3.3 and 6.2.10, Austrian learners' word-stress patterns are influenced by L1 rules for a considerable amount of time (Wieden & Nemser 1991: 234), which, of course, would justify the inclusion of such an activity in an EFL course book designed specifically for Austrian learners. However, *LASER BI+* is a publication targeted at L2 speakers of English all around the world, and the question is whether native speakers of languages other than German have the same problems with word stress. An in-depth analysis of various languages and their common word-stress patterns would certainly go beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it can be safely assumed that there are many EFL learners who find English stress patterns difficult to become accustomed to, both receptively and productively. In light of this, international EFL publications intended for educational purposes need to account for this by providing the students with relevant practice materials, which is certainly the case with *LASER BI+*.

Even though the exercise under discussion is neither particularly communicative nor implicit, the pronunciation issue addressed is definitely important to EFL learners. Advocates of teaching the LFC, the phonology of ELF, might hold that stress shifts within a word family do not always lead to problems of intelligibility; however, in order to be more readily accepted as a conversational partner by native speakers and to avoid ambiguous situations when communicating, an awareness of the different stress patterns that may exist in certain word families surely proves advantageous.

As mentioned in the frame of analysis and evaluation (section 6.1), activities that place appropriate emphasis on individual linguistic forms and at the same time meet institutional requirements (e.g. the TEFL syllabus) can be viewed as effective. Since the task under consideration clearly centres on a language feature (word stress) and because the Austrian curricula (BMBWK 2000 & 2004) demand such foci when it comes to the teaching of certain linguistic forms, this exercise is potentially successful, even more so if methodologically improved.

## 6.5 Task progression in *LASER B1+*

The pronunciation activities included in *LASER B1+* are varied in nature and focus, which would provide a perfect basis for further, more advanced tasks to be incorporated into the speaking sections of *LASER B2*. Sadly, however, Mann & Taylore-Knowles (2008) chose not to have any pronunciation exercises in their student's book. Hence, the following investigation of task progression can solely reflect the progression of activities in the *LASER B1+* student's book.

Three exercises in *LASER B1+* have a continuation in succeeding units, i.e. the tasks on silent letters, weak forms and stress. Whereas 'silent letters 1' (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 36) deals with the omission of sounds that are orthographically represented with the letters <t> (following <s>), <b> (following <m>), <p> (preceding <n>), <k> (preceding <n>), and <gh>, 'silent letters 2' (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 118) focuses merely on silent <h>. One can hardly speak of task progression here, since no development of skills is necessary to successfully complete the succeeding exercise. Rather, the learners are confronted with two separate activities that deal with an overarching phonological issue, namely silent letters.

The first activity on weak forms (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 54) introduces the 'schwa'-sound in six function words that are used in a full sentence each, while 'weak forms 2' (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 144) provides five example sentences which include an unstressed function word each that has not been part of 'weak forms 1'. Again, the difficulty level of both activities is the same, which does not justify classifying the tasks as progressive. Instead, the first exercise could simply be added to the second to form one longer activity without any transition being noticed by the learners.

As regards the tasks focusing on stress, one could speak of 'reverse progression', as 'stress 1' (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 100) deals with sentence stress, whereas 'stress 2' (Taylore-Knowles 2008: 126) centres on word stress, which is traditionally covered before practising suprasegmental features in connected speech. However, the level of difficulty of the two activities is comparable, and moreover, they are devised as completely separate exercises. These facts surely question the traditional view of task progression for word and sentence stress, which also becomes obvious when looking at the table of contents of the works by Pennington (1996) and Kelly (2002). Terming the activities 'sentence stress' and

‘word stress’ instead of using the numbers one and two for the tasks’ titles would have avoided any expectations of progression to arise. Nonetheless, in light of the well-established sequencing of tasks on suprasegmental features, using the expression ‘reverse progression’ to refer to these activities seems acceptable as well. A clear advantage of arranging activities this way is that awareness for stress in larger linguistic structures is raised in the learners at an early stage. Consequently, a later focus on smaller speech units might prove beneficial when aiming to perfect students’ knowledge and production of word-stress patterns, since the learners are already familiar with the more general pronunciation rules of intonation and stress. Therefore, ‘reverse progression’ as set forth above does not necessarily need to be a point of criticism of *LASER B1+*.

Overall, it appears that the pronunciation exercises in *LASER B1+* do not aim at progressively developing phonological competence. The division of tasks into parts one and two gives the impression that the author intended the continuation activity to be a revision rather than a more advanced exercise. Any criticism of task progression in *LASER B1+* must, however, be put into perspective, since *LASER B2* does not include any pronunciation activities at all, which makes a comparison of the two course books with regard to phonological instruction impossible. The fact that there are no pronunciation exercises included in *LASER B2* must be seriously criticised. Judging from the limited scope and unsophisticated methodology of the tasks in *LASER B1+*, it appears as if the authors simply believed they **had to** provide some pronunciation activities rather than thoroughly develop the learners’ phonological skills. In *LASER B2*, they did not even include similar tasks to fill the pages of the course book, but decided to do without pronunciation exercises altogether, which is certainly counterproductive when trying to meet the demands of the curriculum, i.e. striving to improve the students’ pronunciation.



## 7. Conclusion

Pronunciation teaching of one or the other kind has been a part of EFL curricula ever since speakers of other languages have been learning English. This thesis has tried to provide an overview of the various traditions, approaches and views regarding phonological instruction, has introduced ‘best practice’ examples of pronunciation activities, and has presented analyses of tasks included in course books commonly used in secondary-school EFL in Austria.

The definitions of the three general approaches to pronunciation teaching have shown that phonetics and phonology can be integrated into any language course in a number of ways, i.e. using intuitive-imitative, analytic-linguistic or integrative methodologies. Concise descriptions of different methods and movements within TEFL also plainly illustrated that the orientation and methodological nature of pronunciation exercises have changed enormously over the last decades: In the past, explicit tasks using listen-and-repeat activities as well as traditional drills were clearly preferred, whereas today, a more balanced approach is sought which tries to integrate phonological instruction into the wider scope of EFL curricula with the help of implicit pronunciation tasks. This, of course, does not mean that the use of explicit pronunciation teaching methods is not justified; however, current research suggests that a bias towards either explicit or implicit phonological instruction is obviously less effective than a balance of the two. The same applies to the teaching of segmental and suprasegmental features of English phonology. Before the emergence of the Communicative Approach, instruction focused on segmentals, e.g. the articulation of individual sounds and sound discrimination. As soon as the role of suprasegmental features, e.g. intonation and stress, on intelligibility was discovered, teachers and researchers advocated a balanced integration of segmentals and suprasegmentals into EFL pronunciation teaching.

Since the Austrian curriculum for TEFL in lower- and upper-secondary grammar schools requires teachers to cover phonological issues and pronunciation, close scrutiny of available textbooks and teaching materials in terms of the productivity of activities formed the latter part of this thesis. Two course books for lower-secondary level, *MORE! 3* and *4 Enriched course*, and two others aimed at intermediate students at upper-secondary level, *LASER B1+* and *LASER B2*, were analysed with regard to the communicativeness and effectiveness of the exercises included. Interestingly, *LASER B2* does not feature any

pronunciation tasks at all, and the activities in *LASER B1+* and the *MORE!* series are almost exclusively explicit in nature. Consequently, EFL practitioners would need to provide additional materials or adapt those exercises to increase their communicativeness and if necessary make them more implicit, thereby also making them correspond to the demands of the curriculum.

As mentioned in the chapter on pronunciation tasks and sample teaching ideas, activities involving the students' productive skills such as (collaborative) writing tasks or dialogue practice prove particularly beneficial for the development of their phonological competence. A clear advantage of such methods is the fact that the mastery of both segmental and suprasegmental features can easily be furthered, without necessarily making the phonological objectives of the activity explicit to the learners.

The analysis of both the *MORE!* and *LASER* series showed that pronunciation is not one of the authors' main concerns, which becomes obvious by looking at the mere number of pronunciation exercises in the course books under consideration. *LASER B2*, for instance, does not include any tasks that focus on the fostering of phonological competence. Moreover, one could get the impression that the pronunciation activities in *MORE!* and *LASER* were only added to some units of the books to fill empty spaces on the pages rather than to attain an overall linguistic or curricular aim. This assessment is confirmed by the fact that all of the exercises analysed use an extraordinarily simple methodology and consist of only few sub-tasks, if any. It is therefore apparent that textbook authors and material developers need to focus more intensively on furthering the learners' phonological skills by proficiently designing more complex pronunciation materials and activities.

Since the scope of diploma theses has certain limitations, it was only possible to give a broad overview of the individual approaches and methods in TEFL both in the past and in the present. Undoubtedly, the ELF debate, briefly addressed in chapter three, is highly relevant for future developments and research foci in pronunciation teaching and applied linguistics in general. More in-depth academic work will surely be necessary to fully understand and analyse the concept of ELF – and in particular its phonology and consequences for foreign language teaching. Naturally, the selection of books and exercises in chapter six of this thesis could not be overly extensive. However, analyses of other textbooks and activities in the future might yield different results, which would certainly be interesting to compare to the findings presented in the thesis at hand.

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## **Appendix**

### **Abstract (English)**

The role of pronunciation teaching within wider EFL curricula has changed constantly over the last decades depending on which approach was the most prominent at that time. Today, phonological competence is seen as a vital part of general foreign language ability, which justifies the important position currently assigned to pronunciation teaching by applied linguists. Although the ELF movement promotes mutual intelligibility as the ultimate goal of phonological instruction, there can be no doubt that the correct pronunciation of any native-speaker variety must still be pursued in school contexts. Priorities in pronunciation teaching have also changed from practising segmental features of English towards a balanced approach that also includes suprasegmentals, e.g. intonation and stress. In the past, teaching pronunciation explicitly was commonly accepted; since the emergence of the Communicative Approach, however, implicit methods have gained ground, so that today, a balance of explicit and implicit activities should be sought in the classroom. ‘Best practice’ examples of pronunciation exercises and lesson ideas illustrate that tasks involving the learners’ productive skills, e.g. writing and reading out poems or dialogues, are particularly effective. The analysis of four textbooks commonly used in Austrian grammar schools evidently shows that the communicativeness and productiveness of many pronunciation activities must be questioned due to the almost exclusively explicit nature of the exercises. Possibilities of adaptations and additions to the tasks are suggested, and task progression within the respective course book series, which is rather a revision, is also discussed in this diploma thesis.

## **Abstract (German)**

Die Rolle des Ausspracheunterrichts im Rahmen von umfassenden Curricula und Lehrplänen hat sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten stetig gewandelt, abhängig davon, welche Lehr- und Lernmethoden zu jenen Zeiten die profiliertesten waren. Heute wird phonologische Kompetenz als essentieller Bestandteil der allgemeinen Fremdsprachenbeherrschung gesehen, was wiederum die wichtige Position des Ausspracheunterrichts rechtfertigt, die ihm von der angewandten Linguistik zugesprochen wird. Obwohl die ELF-Bewegung gegenseitiges Verstehen als höchstes Ziel des Phonologieunterrichts definiert, darf kein Zweifel daran bestehen, dass in schulischen Kontexten nach wie vor die korrekte Aussprache von L1-Varietäten angestrebt werden muss. Prioritäten im Ausspracheunterricht haben sich ebenfalls geändert: vom Üben von englischen Sprachsegmenten hin zu einer ausgewogenen Methodik, die auch suprasegmentale Elemente, z.B. Betonung und Intonation, beinhaltet. In der Vergangenheit war expliziter Ausspracheunterricht der Normalfall; erst mit dem Aufkommen von kommunikativen Lehr- und Lernansätzen gewannen implizite Methoden an Bedeutung, sodass es heute heißt, im Klassenzimmer sei eine Balance zwischen expliziten und impliziten Aufgabenstellungen anzustreben. ‚Best Practice‘-Beispiele von Ausspracheaufgaben und Unterrichtsideen lassen erkennen, dass Übungen, die die produktiven Fertigkeiten der Schülerinnen und Schüler fordern – etwa das Schreiben und Vorlesen von Gedichten oder Dialogen – besonders effektiv sind. Die Analyse von vier Schulbüchern, die häufig in österreichischen AHS verwendet werden, zeigt, dass bei vielen Aufgaben zur Aussprache bezweifelt werden muss, ob sie tatsächlich kommunikativ und produktiv sein können. Der Grund für diese Zweifel ist der fast ausschließlich explizite Charakter dieser Übungen, weshalb Änderungsmöglichkeiten und denkbare Zusatzaufgaben vorgeschlagen werden. Die Progression der Aufgaben innerhalb der jeweiligen Schulbuchserien, die vielmehr eine Wiederholung ist, wird ebenfalls in dieser Diplomarbeit behandelt.

## **Non-plagiarism declaration**

I hereby declare that the information on which my work is based has been collected by me personally and has not been plagiarised from any unacknowledged sources. I have properly credited the source of any and all quoted or paraphrased material.

Deutsch-Wagram, October 2012

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