

Community, Currency and the Lingua Franca Core
Jennifer Jenkins, Oxford University Press

Jennifer Jenkins is a Senior Lecturer at King's college, London University, where she directs the MA in ELT & Applied Linguistics, and teaches courses in World Englishes, Sociolinguistics and Phonology/Phonetics. Her main research interest is in current linguistic and sociopolitical developments in World Englishes. She is the author of The Phonology of English as an International Language (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Traditional goals of English pronunciation teaching

Traditionally – and still today in the view of many teachers and learners of English – the goal of teaching pronunciation to L2 learners of English is to mimic the accents of native speakers (NSs), either British speakers with Received Pronunciation (RP) accents or American speakers with General American (GA) accents (i.e. the prestige accents of the 2 countries).

It did not much matter that only a minority of NSs in either country actually had these accents themselves (and a very tiny minority indeed in the case of RP). And it did not much matter, either, that virtually no learners acquired these accents, but that their English retained features of their L1 accent.

Then, in the 1980s, came the Critical Period Hypothesis: the discovery that if a second language (L2) was learned after a certain age, the speaker would not acquire a version identical with that of its NSs and, in particular, that they would not acquire a 'nativelike' accent. No one was sure when this period was over, but as far as pronunciation is concerned, the result seemed to be a noticeable L2 regional accent for most learners. The new goal of pronunciation teaching therefore became one of comfortable intelligibility: that is, learners accents were to be comfortably intelligible to NS listeners. The emphasis shifted to those features which were considered to be important as safeguards of NSs' understanding of NNSs' accents, such as word stress and the voiceless and voiced 'th' sounds.

A changing situation

Meanwhile, a dramatic change was taking place in the sociolinguistic context of English use: the rapid expansion of the number of NNSs of English around the world, especially in the Expanding Circle' (Kachru 1992). This has led to the most frequent use of English being to serve as a lingua franca in international settings, mainly among NNSs from different first languages (L1s) such as mainland Europeans. And the change in who is speaking English is inevitably leading to a change in the type of English being spoken. New international varieties of English are emerging through these new contact situations and once these have been described, they are likely to be codified and included in dictionaries and grammars. Although it is too early to say how these lingua franca varieties will develop, early evidence indicates that they will include items such as substitutions for 'th' at the level of pronunciation and an all-purpose question tag (e.g. "isn't it?") at the level of lexicogrammar.

To sum up so far: we have a new international English speaking community for whom it is no longer relevant to look at how NSs speak English with other NSs and then transmit this NS-use to NNSs. Instead, we need to find out what NNSs do and need to be able to do when they speak English to each other in international contexts.

Implications for pronunciation teaching: new (EIL) goals required

The implications of this are, above all, that we need to look at new goals which focus on the new currency in which NNSs are dealing: not just the Euro but the EuroEnglish. The guiding principles for my work researching pronunciation within an EIL paradigm are:

- 1) above all, *mutual intelligibility among NNSs*
- 2) the use of *empirical evidence from EIL communication* rather than from NSNS communication and NS intuition
- 3) greater consideration to *teachability*. That is, we should not assume that learners will learn something just because we teach it, but only if it is consistent with the learner's current stage of acquisition. And some items of ? pronunciation, I believe, are learnt late if at all (e.g. pitch

- movement), so that all teachers can do is to prime learners for future learning if they receive extensive exposure to NS models outside the classroom later on.
- 4) the possibility of *NNS-led innovation/creativity* in EIL, and acceptance of the emerging L2 regional varieties of English that are resulting from these new contact situations, instead of labelling anything which differs from a NS variant as an 'error'. In other words, a need to redefine error in EIL.

A proposal: the Lingua Franca Core

My Lingua Franca Core for international pronunciation is based almost entirely on empirical data drawn from EIL interactions. Instances where pronunciation was the cause of miscommunication and where items were found to cause miscommunication regularly, were designated 'core' for EIL.

On the other hand, where items differed from NS ways of pronouncing, but did not cause miscommunication, these items were designated 'non-core' and instead of being regarded as errors, were to be regarded as instances of L2 regional variation: Spanish-English, German-English, Japanese-English and so on, comparable with Scottish-English, Irish-English, Boston-English and the like.

Core features

1. All consonant sounds except for voiceless and voiced 'th' as in the words 'thin' and 'this', and dark 'l' (pronounced with the back rather than the tip of the tongue raised, as in RP 'feel' as compared with 'leaf').
2. Phonetic requirements: aspiration following word-initial voiceless stops /p/, /t/ and /k/ to prevent them being heard as /b/, /d/ and /g/.
3. Consonant to be simplified only according to the rules of English syllable structure which, in particular, means:
 - no omission in word-initial clusters e.g. in product, strap
 - in middle and final clusters only certain consonants can be omitted - usually the middle of three consonants, and often a /t/ or /d/ e.g. 'Christmas' ^ 'Christmas' but not 'Christas' or 'Chritmas'
 - addition vowel sounds is preferable to deleting consonant sounds, e.g. it is better to say 'Macudonaludo' as a Japanese speaker might pronounce 'Macdonald', than 'Madono' as a Taiwanese speaker might pronounce it.
4. Vowel sounds
 - the contrast between long and short vowels need to be maintained e.g. 'live' v 'leave', 'stuff' v 'staff', 'cot' and 'caught' etc, although it is possible that in Euro-English the short and long 'i' may be merging in a sound half way between the two.
 - L2 regional vowel qualities are permissible provided they are consistent
5. Production and placement of nuclear (tonic) stress within tone groups. e.g. 'You deserve to be SACKED' v 'You deSERVE to be sacked'. In the first example, the person referred to has not been sacked but deserves to be, while in the second example, the speaker is acknowledging that the referent's sacking – which has already taken place - was deserved.

Outside the Lingua Franca Core, any pronunciation showing mother tongue influence should no longer be regarded as an error, but as an instance of regional accent. In other words, for EIL, L2 regional variants are a matter of *difference* rather than *deficiency*.

Non-core features

1. Voiceless and voiced 'th', and dark 'l'
2. Vowel quality, e.g. a German-English speaker might pronounce the 'a' in the word 'jazz' as an 'e', and thus say 'jezz'.
3. Weak forms, i.e. the use of schwa instead of the full vowel sound in words such as 'tə', 'frɒm', 'of', 'wəs', 'də'
4. Other features of connected speech, especially assimilation e.g. the assimilation of the sound /n/ at the end of one word to the sound at the beginning of the next, so that 'green paint' becomes 'green paint'.
5. The direction of pitch movements: these are unteachable: especially as regards the so-called 'attitudinal' function, i.e. the use of specific pitch movements to indicate particular attitudes.
6. The placement of word-stress, although at the time of writing it seems possible that new EIL word stress rules may be emerging, and if so,

then these will eventually become the norm in EIL interaction (see Peng & Ann 2001).

7. Stress timing, which does not exist except in nursery rhymes, poetry and the like. It is impossible to speak in a stress-timed manner in conversational speech while attention is focused on meaning. On the other hand, it is possible that syllable timing may one day become the norm for EIL.

Two final points about the Lingua Franca Core:

- It is not yet totally definitive. Although I believe the principal is a good one, and one I am confident will remain with us for as long as English is an international language, the fine detail may change slightly as more researchers test it out. The indications so far, though, are that it is mainly accurate even if not yet perfect.
- What the core means for each individual L2 group of English speakers is a matter for them to decide. In the case of Spanish, Robin Walker has already given much thought to which pronunciation features learners need to work on (see Walker 2001, 2002).

Activity types to teach pronunciation for EIL

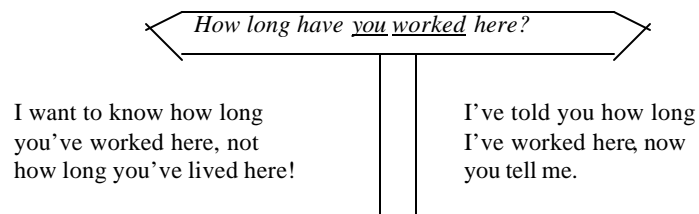
The main problem for teachers is that there are not yet any published teaching materials which focus on pronunciation for EIL purposes, so that at present it is necessary for teachers either to adapt existing materials or to write their own. Two activity types are particularly useful for practising pronunciation for EIL, and are as suitable for classes where learners share the same L1 as those where they have a range of L1 backgrounds:

Dictation

The benefit of dictation-based activities is that they provide evidence for both speaker and listener. At the end of the activity, the speaker and listener(s) can compare their written versions, discuss any discrepancies and discover whether the cause was a productive or receptive problem. Dictation demonstrates very clearly to learners the importance of pronunciation for understanding. It can be carried out with same-L1 or different-L1 groups, although when learners share an L1, the teacher should find ways of stopping them 'translating' any L1- errors. Many of the activity types in Davis & Rinvolucri (1988) can be adapted to include the core pronunciation problems of learners from specific L1s.

Minimal pairs

These activity types are successful even when learners share an L1 because there is no means for the listener to select the correct response unless the speaker produces the correctly pronounced initiator. Three examples follow. The first is taken from Mark Hancock (1995) and focuses on nuclear stress placement. The listener has to decide where the speaker placed the nuclear stress and choose either the 'right' or 'left' interpretation accordingly.



What time does your plane leave?

Left: I know what time the airport bus leaves, but when does your plane leave?

Right: My plane leaves at midnight. What about yours?

The second activity comes from a book produced by Adam Brown (1997) for Singaporean students of English. In this book, the initiators and responses are on different pages so that the students are not able to see one another's choices. Note that the initiator and response are not necessarily in the same order.

1 (a) Did the shepherd take his pick?

Yes, he chose the red tractor.

1 (b) Did the shepherd take his pig?

Yes, and he sold it at market.

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