THEORIES AND APPROACHES IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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ABSTRACT. *The area of English language teaching and learning has always been a fast-moving one and, within this area, pronunciation has been no exception. This paper explores recent developments in English pronunciation teaching and learning, and aims to show how pronunciation pedagogies are attempting to make the area at once more accessible and more interesting by keeping pace with new theories and technologies.*
KEYWORDS: *pronunciation, Lingua Franca Core nuclear; theories; materials*

RESUMEN. *La enseñanza y aprendizaje del inglés, y el tema de la pronunciación no constituye una excepción, ha sido siempre un área puntera y que ha despertado gran interés. Este trabajo explora algunas innovaciones en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de la pronunciación y pretende mostrar cómo las técnicas pedagógicas en torno a la pronunciación pueden ser más accesibles y despertar mayor interés si corren paralelas con las nuevas teorías y las nuevas tecnologías.*
PALABRAS CLAVE: *pronunciación, Lingua Franca; teorías; materiales.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation has always been perceived as a difficult area by teachers and learners alike. Like listening, pronunciation is sometimes neglected in the process of language teaching in favour of reading and writing, which are rather more likely to lead to success in examination in cultures which are so much more focused on those media. However, it seems rather pointless to study a (living) foreign language at all if one does not intend to communicate in it with other speakers of that language and, to this end, one must learn how to pronounce it in a way which can be understood by a variety of listeners. English, whether by accident of history, foreign policy, or through purposeful educational policy, has arisen as a world lingua franca, and being intelligible when speaking it has therefore received a great deal of attention.

Pronunciation has a long and distinguished history in second language teaching. As is pointed out by Seidlhofer (2001:56), it "stood at the very beginning of language teaching methodology as a principled, theoretically-founded discipline, originating with the late-nineteenth-century Reform Movement". Phoneticians interested in the teaching of pronunciation from a number of European countries were brought together by the Reform Movement, and this resulted in the establishment of pronunciation as a major concern of second language instruction lasting well into the second half of the twentieth century, even in the teaching of English (see Collins and Mees 1999; Howatt 2004). Their collaboration also led to the founding of the International Phonetic Association and the development of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), capable of representing the full inventory of sounds of all known languages. In the twenty-first century, the IPA is still the universally acknowledged system of phonetic transcription.

When English pronunciation teaching takes place in institutions all over the world, the models adopted are generally derived from what are sometimes referred to as older varieties of English (OVEs), these being for the most part British and American English. The accents usually selected as models, Received Pronunciation (RP) in the case of British English and General American (GA) in the case of American English, are comprehensively described in pronouncing dictionaries (see Roach et al., 2006; Upton et al., 2001; Wells, 2000) and books

on English phonetics and phonology (see, e.g., Roach 2000; Kreidler 2004; and for an exhaustive account Cruttenden 2001) – although some more recently conceived texts do include other Englishes (see, e.g. Collins & Mees 2003; Deterding & Poedjosoedarmo 1998; McMahon 2002). Countries such as Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines and many of those in South America tend to use American English as a model, whereas British English is found in former colonies and protectorates, such as Hong Kong, India and certain African countries, in South American countries such as Chile and Argentina, and also in Europe.

This approach to the selection of a model is intuitive rather than empirical, and can be based on sociocultural, political or market-driven choices. OVEs are regarded by many as "proper English", and any local L2-influenced variety is simply not good enough. An example of this way of thinking can be seen in the case of India; although Indian English is a recognised nativised variety of English (NVE), many Indian speakers of English aspire towards RP, rather than treating Indian English as a valid model in its own right. English language teachers, too, may find they come up against prejudice in comparison to native speakers of OVEs, or even feel inferior as teachers, if they have a regional or non-native speaker (NNS) variety of English. Writers such as Moszynska (2007) and Walker (2001) remind us, however, that it does not follow that a native speaker (NS) of an OVE is automatically "fully prepared to teach students at various language levels" (Moszynska 2007: 3). As Walker (2001) comments, it should not be assumed that the NS is necessarily best equipped to teach pronunciation; "the best instructor is the person with a detailed practical knowledge of both the L1 and L2 phonetics" (Walker 2001: 8), and this is often not the NS. Indeed, may NS varieties are not intelligible to other NSs.

In research, NNS English is usually compared with OVEs, such as in Setter (2006), Pickering (2002), Low et al. (2000) and Tajima et al. (1997). Similarly, NSs of OVEs are very often the listeners in tests of intelligibility (see, for example, Anderson-Hsieh et al. 1992; Tajima et al. 1997) – although studies which look at the opposite do exist, for example Derwing & Munro (2001) and Derwing et al. (2002), which look at how intelligible NSs are to NNSs. It is, of course, necessary to have a point of reference for such studies, but in future it may be the case that comparisons are made between accents / varieties of English which do not involve OVEs at all. If intelligibility between NSs and NNSs is a source of data for researchers, intelligibility in English between NNS groups would seem to provide endless possibilities for research, and could lead to the development of teaching materials which are geared towards particular English communication situations – between Hong Kong and Japanese speakers of English, perhaps. The scope for study, then, is almost infinite.

2. RECENT THEORY: THE LINGUA FRANCA CORE

A theory which has had a great impact on teachers of English pronunciation recently is Jennifer Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core. Using conversations in English between NNSs as data, Jenkins (2000) found that the chief issue for intelligibility in international contexts was pronunciation. Looking more closely, she identified key areas which need to be addressed if information was to be exchanged effectively. To summarise, these areas are as follows:
1.   The full consonantal inventory of English, with the following provisos:
   a. rhotic (e.g. American) [ɹ] rather than other types
   b. intervocalic /t/ rather than a tap [ɾ]
   c. most substitutions of /θ/, /ð/, and dark /l/ permissible
   d. close approximations to core consonants generally permissible

e. certain approximations not permissible – i.e., where there is a risk that they will be heard as a different consonant. (E.g., Spanish use of [β] for /b/, which can be heard as /v/ in e.g. habit, sounding instead like have it.)
2. Phonetic requirements
   a. aspiration following /p t k/ (although recent discussion with Dr Jenkins leads me to understand she may be rethinking this requirement)
   b. pre-fortis clipping
3. Consonant clusters
   a. initial clusters not simplified
   b. medial and final clusters simplified only according to English rules of elision
4. Vowel sounds
   a. maintenance of vowel length contrasts
   b. L2 regional qualities permissible if consistent, but /ɜː/ to be preserved.
5. Nuclear stress production and placement and division of speech stream into tone units/word groups

The aim of this list, which is referred to as the LFC (for "Lingua Franca Core"), is to specify which features of English pronunciation make a difference in communication in international situations using English as a lingua franca, i.e., between NNSs. Jenkins wishes us to understand that the LFC "is neither a pronunciation model nor a restricted simplified core" (2000: 158), but instead defines the features of English pronunciation which will make speakers from a variety of first language (L1) backgrounds more intelligible to one another. From that perspective, it does have obvious appeal to pronunciation teaching pedagogies, although it is not without its critics; see the volume by Dziubalska-Kołaczyk & Przedlacka (2005), which contains many papers on this topic.

It is possible to see how an approach based on the LFC compares to a traditional approach for selecting pronunciation priorities for a given language by looking at Walker (2001: 6), which compared a list of difficulties for Spanish speakers of English arrived at through contrastive analysis, compiled from O'Connor (1967), Kenworthy (1987) and Taylor (1993), with the LFC. Almost all the difficulties concerning vowels, including those marked as high priority by Kenworthy (1987), are not listed as problematic in the LFC – with the exception of vowel length variation. Similarly, most matters of stress, rhythm and intonation highlighted by O'Connor (1967), Kenworthy (1987) and Taylor (1993) are not attested in the LFC, the only one being nuclear stress placement, which has no equivalent in Spanish. Consonants and consonant clusters, however, are a different matter; the majority of difficulties listed in O'Connor (1967), Kenworthy (1987) and Taylor (1993) are found in the LFC. The well-known propensity for Spanish speakers to insert /e/ before /s/ clusters, a headache for any teacher working on pronunciation with Spanish speakers and usually attributed to negative transfer from the L1 to the L2, is not seen as problematic from the point of view of NNS interactions, however. It could be concluded that, were a teacher to base his/her classes on LFC priorities rather than a full list such as that compiled by Walker, more time could be spent on specific areas of difficulty which would make a difference in intelligibility in an international context, and other issues, which are based rather on OVE NS norms, could be left until later, at the discretion of the teacher or through learner choice. Walker (2001: 8) concludes that what is in fact required is an inversion of the "standard, negative attitude towards the learner's L1" when teaching monolingual groups.

It has become unfashionable to assert that OVEs like RP or GenAm should be used as a pronunciation model in this era of global English. There are many reasons for this, not least that the imposition of any variety is akin to linguistic imperialism. In my opinion, what the target accent is should be the choice of the individual – although, in reality, in a school situation at least, this is often driven by governmental language policy. Many speakers do

still strive to achieve a native speaker accent such as RP or GenAm, and this is their choice. However, for the majority of speakers, a native-like accent may be neither required nor desirable. The main point is that it should not matter what accent or variety a speaker has as long as intelligibility is not compromised. As Parashchuk points out, "one of the conditions for successful intercultural communication is a certain basic degree of similarity in different varieties of English" (2000: 2). The LFC specifically targets features which may cause unintelligibility in international contexts, and for this reason it is a highly sensible place for English language teachers and learners to start.

As far as teachers are concerned, there is a definite need to have clear English pronunciation. Local features leading to unintelligibility need to be addressed. A thorough understanding of the phonetics and phonology of English and of your L1 are therefore of paramount importance, so that language specific choices can be made which capitalise on the basic premise of the LFC.

3. RECENT MATERIALS

Materials for pronunciation teaching and learning currently on the market range from those offering an approach based on OVE models to those encouraging a more global perspective, and those based on time-honoured tradition to those following newer approaches to language description. In recent years, English pronunciation writers have embraced the media of the audio CD, CD-ROM and web-based teaching. Pronunciation is a difficult area for classroom-based teaching and learning, and also self-study, using a textbook alone; although materials have for decades been accompanied by audio cassettes, reel-to-reel tapes and vinyl records, the new media now available enable pronunciation teaching to be so much more immediate, interactive and accessible to learners of English.

In the sections which follow, I will present some of the more recent materials on the market for pronunciation teaching and learning, whether for classroom use or self-study. I have unashamedly chosen my favourites, as there are many excellent materials out there which cannot be incorporated into this paper. I will start by looking at the seventeenth edition of Daniel Jones' *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (Roach, Hartman & Setter 2006), referred to here as *EPD17*, and move on to looking at other book-based materials with accompanying CDs, before finally examining some web-based materials.

3.1. *Books*

3.1.1. The English Pronouncing Dictionary

For most people involved in pronunciation teaching, a pronunciation dictionary is simply a tool that is occasionally useful as a way of resolving a problem, or as a source of words for exercise material; for a small number of enthusiasts, however, a pronunciation dictionary is much more than that, as it stands as a representation, or codification, of a standard accent of the language. This special status of "setting a standard" is something that all dictionaries aspire to. It is therefore important that the contents of a dictionary should be regularly reviewed and updated. In the days when dictionaries were type-set by hand, changes were slow and expensive to make; computer technology has made it possible to update the contents much more easily and systematically.

I should point out that in our work on *EPD17*, or previous editions, we have never wished to suggest that we are setting a standard that must be observed. Our intention is only to provide useful information and some guidance; however, we are aware that no amount of

caveats will prevent some teachers (especially those who are not native speakers of English) from treating the dictionary as "gospel" and insisting on their students keeping strictly to its recommended pronunciations.

As mentioned above, revision is a constant necessity. In revising *EPD17* we sought to do the following:

1. Update the headword list: We have added hundreds of words and names which are either newly-coined (e.g. *fashionista*) or newly important for various reasons (e.g. *Madejski*, *Opus Dei*). Words can also be deleted from the dictionary; this is a rarity, since words which have once been current but have passed from common use are still permanently recorded in written literature and film. However, we sometimes notice redundant or wrong items, such as the verb *blither* which Daniel Jones (wrongly, we believe) took to be an English verb on which the phrase *blithering idiot* was based.

2. Indicate pronunciation change: Some individual words acquire different pronunciations (e.g. perennial questions such as the pronunciation of *either*, *zebra*, *nephew*, which tend ultimately to be resolved by the choice of younger speakers). Many pronunciation changes (such as the increased use of glottalization and the glottal replacement of intervocalic /t/, or the fronting of /uː/), are not recorded in a phoneme-based transcriptions. We can notice some more systematic changes, however: there is a set of words in English spelt with letter 'o' but traditionally pronounced in RP/BBC with the /ʌ/ – examples are *one*, *tongue*, *none*, *mongrel*. Accents of the Midlands and North-West of England typically use /ɒ/ instead. This latter pronunciation has become more and more frequently used in modern RP/BBC, and in EPD17 we now give this as an accepted pronunciation.

3. Show changes in transcription conventions: Although phonetics and phonology, as applied to the teaching of pronunciation, are rather conservative and slow to change, there are nevertheless currents of change and conflict that can occasionally lead to changes on the way that pronunciations are represented. A minor change made for *EPD17* is to abandon the use of what can be called "obligatory syllabic /l/": in earlier editions edited by us, words ending with the consonant /l/ represented in spelling with *-le* (e.g. *bottle*) together with words derived from them (e.g. *bottling*) were transcribed with the syllabic /l̩/ while words such as *petal* were transcribed with /-ᵊl/. This entailed the obligatory pronunciation of *bottle* with syllabic /l/, while *petal* could be pronounced *either* with syllabic /l/ *or* with /əl/. This differentiation of /l/ pronunciations has now been dropped in favour of a uniform treatment with /-ᵊl / to avoid confusion.

4. Incorporate material additional to main word-entries: Pronunciation dictionary design has changed to include a wide range of additional material that may be of value to users. These include information panels inserted at relevant points among the dictionary entries, tutorial material, exercises with answers provided and, very importantly, audio material and audio exercise facilities on an accompanying CD-ROM. In *EPD17*, we have added ten short study sections on topics ranging from English syllable structure to differences between British and American pronunciation and, in addition to the British recordings on the CD-ROM, there is now a spoken pronunciation in American English for each headword. The totality of this additional material has transformed the nature of the pronunciation dictionary, making it much more usable as a self-study tool, and also as a tool for research.

3.1.2. English Intonation

John Wells' recent book (2006) makes use of audio material on CD to bring English intonation to life. Taking a fairly traditional approach to intonation aimed at the learner of English, the material in this book is presented clearly, and breaks what is a complex area into easily digestible chunks that build into a workable description of English intonation. There is a good deal of practice material and examples are plentiful.

Wells' main premise is the use of the three Ts: tone, tonicity and tonality. Tone refers to pitch movement on the nuclear syllable. Wells focuses on three tones only: fall, rise and fall-rise, although there is discussion later in the text in which further divisions are noted within these categories (see sections 5.5-5.7). Tonicity refers to the placing of the nucleus, sometimes referred to as focus. Tonality is to do with chunking, or breaking the stream of speech into meaningful groups.

The structure of the text is to look at intonation in relation to grammatical and discourse meaning before going on to finer nuances in intonation patterns. Sections on statements, questions, focus, "the old and the new", and phrasal verbs are all directed at enabling the learner to use intonation to signal meanings at various levels. Assuming a learner one wishes to get his/her intonation right, this is certainly an excellent place to start.

3.1.3. Pronunciation Practice Activities

I have mentioned above that pronunciation is often neglected in language teaching classrooms, and perceived as difficult by teachers and learners alike. Hewings' handbook for teachers (2004) follows the format of the very popular *Grammar Practice Activities* (Ur 1988) and other texts in the series, and brings pronunciation in well-planned, unthreatening sized chunks to the teacher and student. Hewings is no stranger to pronunciation materials, having previously authored the enjoyable text book *Pronunciation Tasks* (1993).

Hewings (2004) starts with a short introduction to the area of phonetics, phonology and pronunciation for teachers, as background for the activities which follow. This includes a section which asks teachers to reflect on what level and kind of proficiency the teacher and student should be aiming for (pp. 11-13), asking such questions as "In what contexts will your students mainly be using English after the course?", and "Do your students show an inclination to speak English with a particular pronunciation?" This is good to see, as increasingly both teachers and learners are realising that it is more important to be intelligible to other speakers than to speak English with an OVE accent.

Issued with an audio CD, Hewings (2004) gives straightforward, easy-to-follow lesson plans and photocopiable materials for teachers wishing to cover pronunciation in their classrooms. Topics range from those which aim to develop awareness of English pronunciation (e.g. differences between consonant clusters in English and the learner's L1; pronouncing names; comparing slow and quick speech) through to issues with individual speech sounds, and how pronunciation interacts with grammar and spelling. Materials are each given a suitability to level rating, the time it takes to complete the activity, and a note on what preparation is required. There are some useful pronunciation tests, both for general problems and more specific issues, and appendices detailing information such as problems specific groups of learners might have, word stress rules, and how consonants combine in clusters. The audio CD provides example pronunciations using southern British English, and OVE, but Hewings notes that this CD is not essential, and that the recordings on it should not necessarily be regarded as a target model (2004: 2).

3.2. *Web-based materials*

3.2.1. Streaming Speech

Writing materials for the student from the computer generation requires a lot of thought, imagination and ingenuity. *Streaming Speech* is a web-based application which demonstrates these characteristics at every click of the mouse. *Streaming Speech* aims to help advanced or intermediate learners of English learn to listen to fast speech (200-500 words per minute) and be able to follow it better, to become more fluent through learning about spontaneous speech, and to keep listeners interested by learning skills such as the use of filled pauses to buy time. The presentation is very attractive, with delightful graphics, an easy-to-use toolbar on the left hand side of the window, pop-ups containing useful information at salient points, clear English with glossaries for less common words and phrases, and a layout which is generally highly accessible.

The original British edition begins with an introduction, and then has ten chapters, each addressing a different aspect of fast, connected speech. The first eight chapters are hosted by eight of the author's colleagues – four male and four female – with the last two using the speech of a variety of these colleagues in workshops on sounds and suprasegmentals. Each of the first eight chapters has the following format: an introduction to the speaker and topic followed by a listening activity targeted at the fastest meaningful sections; focus on the sections of the recording which contain the answers, with a look at how fast the speaker was speaking in words per minute; focus on discourse features in the recording; focus on segments; work on "streaming speech" (trying out fast, connected speech); and finally a review section, telling the student what has been achieved in that chapter. As well as providing answers in particular sections, it is possible for the student to record him/herself and give a self-evaluation in some of the sections of each chapter.

Part of Chapter One, hosted by "Corony", is available as a demonstration on line. The student learns about English "short vowels" /ɪ e æ ɒ ʌ ʊ/, how to merge words together so that they form a "speech unit" rather than remaining separate, elision of speech sounds, and liaison. The initial interactive exercises are accompanied by encouraging feedback in clause form rather than a simple tick or cross – e.g., "and you got this right" – which is motivating for learners, aided somewhat by the fact that the unit begins with an exercise in listening for specific information which is relatively easy, as do all the chapters. Together with the feedback is an explanation of why you were right or wrong, and in all cases it is possible to listen again to the section with the answer in it as many times as is desired. Indeed, students can go back and do the exercise again if they wish. The answers are retained by the software, and students are given a final score at the end of each chapter.

The technique used for "streaming speech" in section 4.4, which Cauldwell himself demonstrates, makes it sound very straightforward and approachable for a learner of English. Presented in a pop-up, the student is guided by starting with a pause between each word, and then slowly building up speed, rhythmic pattern and other features of connected speech until your speech matches that of the target section. The student is then able to make a recording and compare it to the target. The ability to listen to and evaluate one's own version in comparison with a native speaker is an excellent feature of these materials, as it is not always easy to self-monitor in an independent learning situation. Here, it is made accessible – as long as you have a microphone somewhere on your computer.

Recent updates to this on-line teaching material include a North American English version, and there are also courses available in listening to accents of English from around the British Isles, North America and the world. This is to be applauded, as there is little material

available which teaches listening using anything other than standard OVEs. In this age of English as a lingua franca, *Streaming Speech* has a head start.

3.2.2 The Sounds of Spoken Language

I am constantly being asked by learners of English pronunciation where they can get materials which demonstrate the production of speech sounds with a video image of someone actually speaking. Hosted by the University of Iowa (2001-2005), this site is a multi-media pronunciation *tour de force* which does just that. By selecting "American English", the student is able to choose any speech sound from that language, and see not only an animation of the vocal tract when that sound is made but also a step-by-step description of the production of the sound. A video clip showing a real speaker producing the sound is also available, accompanied by keywords in orthographic and phonemic transcription with associated sound files. The site boasts attractive graphics and an accessible user interface, and is great fun to use. Spanish and German are also available, but sadly there is no British English version at the moment. The site requires Flash 7.

3.2.3. Plato and Toni

These two sites on English intonation are ease itself to use, and present aspects of tonicity and tone in a highly clear, accessible and fun way. PLATO (Maidment 2000a) stands for "Place the Tonic". On listening to a series of utterances one by one, the student highlights the tonic syllable (or nucleus) in an orthographic representation using arrow buttons at the top of the screen. Feedback is then available, and the student is able to listen again to the utterance if desired to find out where he/she went wrong. Nucleus placement has been identified as a crucial element in intelligibility in English (see above on the LFC) and this site trains the student nicely. By contrast, TONI (Maidment 2000b) is designed to help the listener identify tones in the English language. One listens to an utterance, selects the tone used, and is then given immediate feedback. Both sites are presented with clear graphics, and I have found them to be immensely useful when teaching students how intonation works in English.

These sites are just two in a suite of web tutorials available at www.phon.ucl.ac.uk, which is a veritable cornucopia of linguistic and phonetic resources. The visitor can download phonetic fonts, programmes for analysing speech, speech data, and also read information and advice on a range of topics relating to phonetics and speech.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have discussed the issue of intelligibility vs. "native-like" pronunciation as a target, mentioned one recent theory which is causing pronunciation educators to examine their approaches to teaching this important area, and introduced various recently published materials for pronunciation teaching and learning, some of which look forward in terms of pronunciation theories and pedagogy, and some which take a more traditional approach based on tried and tested methodology. From this snapshot of the area, it can be seen that pronunciation teaching theories and pedagogies are thriving and, I hope, moving in a direction which is making the area more accessible to teachers and learners alike. With such attractive and accessible materials available on the market, one can only hope as a pronunciation teaching professional that this area is brought back into classrooms where it has been missing, and strengthened in classrooms where it is already taught by the enthusiastic teacher.

I should emphasise again, however, that the materials mentioned here represent a selection based on my own personal choice; there are many other publications available, and I list some of them at the end of this paper. What is certainly clear is that those developing materials for English pronunciation are making best use of a range of media, and that we can expect this dynamic field to continue to evolve and keep pace with advances in technology.

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6.4. *Websites*

http://hctv.humnet.ucla.edu/departments/linguistics/VowelsandConsonants/vowels/contents.html – this rather long address leads to Peter Ladefoged's pages related to his book *Vowels and Consonants* (Blackwell, 2005). If you follow the first link it leads you to a clickable IPA chart (see Appendix 1).

http://wtt.org.uk – Web Transcription Tool, an online phonemic transcription programme which gives you feedback if your transcriptions have errors.

http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/staff/tench/tswords.html – Transcribing English Words by Paul Tench of Cardiff University.

http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/ – Professor John Wells' homepage is full of interesting things, from papers on RP and lecture handouts to downloadable fonts and his own blog.

http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/resource/index.html – the resources page at UCL's Department of Phonetic and Linguistics. Go here to find links to TONI and PLATO.

http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/phonology.htm – Andrew Moore's introduction to English phonology, which is part of his excellent site of resources for British teachers. Well worth a visit.