

# Should we be teaching our students the pronunciation of English as an International Language?

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## **What is English as an International Language?**

Part and parcel with the trend towards 'globalization', the English language has emerged as the undisputed de facto medium of communication in the modern world. Second language speakers of English (L2) now far outnumber mother tongue speakers. (L1) There are estimated to be around 337 million mother-tongue speakers of English. Depending on how competence is measured, estimates of the number of speakers of English as a second language range from 335 million with 'native-like fluency' to 1,350 million communicating (1985) with 'reasonable competence' (Crystal 1997: 60—61).

Kachru has developed the image of a series of 3 concentric circles to illustrate the spread of English throughout the world (1985). The 'inner circle' is made up of the countries where English is the national language (ENL countries), the 'outer circle' consists of countries where English is used in everyday life and is often designated as a second 'official' language (ESL countries). The outermost 'expanding circle' comprises those countries where English is used and taught as a foreign language (EFL).

In Kachru's scheme, the 'ownership' of the language still rests with the inner circle members who are labelled as 'norm-providing'. Native speakers set and supervise the rules as to what is acceptable pronunciation and grammar. The ESL countries are seen as 'norm-developing', and the

EFL countries as 'norm-dependent'. However, partly in reaction to accusations of "language imperialism", the notion that the ENL countries should continue to 'set' the norms is countered by the growth of a school of thought proposing a new approach to the teaching of English pronunciation.

Proponents of 'English as an International language' (E. I. L.) take the view that, since English is now used as an international 'tool' of communication—a modern *Lingua Franca*—it no longer 'belongs' just to the native speaker, but to everyone who uses it, whether for work, study or simply for entertainment (Widdowson 1994a:385). They argue that it is time for teachers of English as a Foreign Language (E. F. L.) to take a fresh look at their pedagogical assumptions in light of the fact that the goal of many of today's speakers of English is not to attain native-like fluency and is simply to communicate, in the course of their everyday life, with others who, like themselves, are not necessarily native speakers of English and are not operating in an English-speaking country.

The promoters of E. I. L argue that, from a pedagogical perspective, this makes English different from other languages which are still learnt primarily in order to communicate with speakers in the L1 country. Recognition of this fact requires a shift in perspective: no longer should native-like fluency be the goal of pronunciation teaching. Instead, teachers should be aiming to help their students attain an acceptable level of "intelligibility" when speaking in English. Whereas, in the past, this would have meant intelligibility to the L1 native speaker, it now means intelligibility to an international L2 listener.

### **The Shift in Perspective**

The term EFL ('English as a Foreign Language') is used to describe the teaching of English to speakers of other languages. It is based on the assumption that L2 learners of English are aiming to attain native-like production and reception skills in the language. Consequently, teaching methodology seeks to provide accurate models of L1 spoken English and to

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describe and practice the full complexity of English pronunciation—both the segmental and supra-segmental features. There are two points to note with regard to the traditional EFL approach to the teaching of pronunciation.

Firstly, it has always been evident that there is already a selective, prescriptive element in choosing which pronunciation to teach. The British “Received Pronunciation” (RP) and the American “General American” (GA) accent are, themselves constructs—anonymous models rather than representations of any one of the wide variety of regional accents actually found on the ground<sup>1)</sup>. If we talk about a real ‘native speaker’ we could be referring to any number of national and local accents—American, British, Australian, Londoner, Welshman etc...and shouldn’t speakers from the ESL community—Singaporean, Indian—be acceptable models too? “The notion of a generic native speaker has become so diversified that it has lost its meaning” (Kramersch 1993:49).

As far as pronunciation is concerned, this awareness of the legitimacy of many competing Englishes has led to a gradual theoretical shift in attitudes within EFL methodological theory. In the early 1980s the approach towards teaching pronunciation was normative, with RP or GA offered as standard pronunciation (Quirk 1982 and Kachru). By the late 1980s, advocating an acceptance not only of many alternative ENL or ESL varieties of English but also of L2 variation was becoming more common in the theoretical writings (Byram 1989, Prodromou 1988 and Kramersch 1993, 1998). The influence of theory on practice is seen today in many of the textbooks which have deliberately incorporated a variety of accents—ENL, ESL and EFL—into the listening exercises.

Secondly, the shift in attitude that began in the 1980s was predicated on the notion that the receiver, in international circles, was just as likely to be a non-native speaker too. Communication in EIL is more commonly L2-L2 than L2-L1. Since the early 1990s, E. I. L. proponents have insisted that we need to question the relevancy of trying to teach L1 pronunciation

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1) Less than 3% of British people speak RP. (Crystal 1995).

norms to people who are rarely likely to communicate with an L1 speaker. With this in mind, it has become widely argued in recent years that L2 influences on the pronunciation of English should not be considered ‘errors’ unless they seriously threaten understanding (‘intelligibility’). However, there is still much work to be done on establishing a common ground with regards to the concept of ‘intelligibility’. Until recently, the criteria for what is considered to be ‘intelligible’ has, itself, been based on what is intelligible to the native speaker. Little research has been done on what the non-native listener finds understandable. This is where recent findings in Second Language Acquisition research and in so-called “Interlanguage Talk” are proving useful.

Indeed, the recent proposals for E. I. L. are built upon the foundations of research in interlanguage talk and language transfer. RP and GA have been deemed unacceptable as norms, firstly because of their association with notions of linguistic imperialism, secondly, because of their perceived artificiality and, finally, because of their complexity. This does not, however, eliminate the need to have some kind of ‘standard’ English. Here is where the advocates of EIL come in. They argue that there is an increasing need to ‘promote’ (Jenkins 2000:11) international intelligibility and, consequently, some new ‘standard’ English as the number of EFL speakers increases. Bansal’s (1990) idea that it must be possible to identify and label ‘minimum standards of mutual intelligibility’ is the motivation behind much of the recent work in EIL.

### **Interlanguage Talk**

If we want to establish what the ‘minimum standards of mutual intelligibility’ between all L2 speakers of English are, the logical step is to start by examining how the English language is presently being used within these non L1-speaking, international, groups. What kind of English do L2 speakers use with each other? The term, “interlanguage talk” was first used by Krashen (1981) to describe the simplified lin-

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guistic code L2 speakers use to communicate (see Long and Porter 85 and Ellis 94). Research has shown a heightened amount of miscommunication as a direct result of pronunciation errors.

Jenkins (2000) focuses entirely on the areas of miscommunication amongst ILT speakers as the basis of her attempt to find a 'Lingua Franca core' that can be labelled, described and taught as EIL. Her aim is to establish a simplified set of rules on what needs to be taught to ensure 'international intelligibility':

"If we can identify precisely which phonological and phonetic features affect intelligibility for ILT hearers... we can then devise pedagogic measures to facilitate the accurate production of these by ILT speakers".

She argues that many features of L1 accents can be ignored since they do not affect intelligibility. This turns EFL upon its head since she concludes that many of the most distinctive features of English pronunciation do not need to be taught. Her proposals will be analysed below.

Another of her important tenets is that where we can simplify we should. She bases many of her judgements on the criteria of "teachability", which is not a new concept in itself. However, Jenkins' method for assessing teachability within the classroom context is founded upon recent knowledge of the way in which the process of *language transfer* imposes constraints upon a learner's ability to categorize and produce the sounds of English.

## **Understanding Language Transfer**

In their bid to develop a 'common core' of EIL phonology, theorists have sought to apply what has been learned of the processes involved in second language acquisition (SLA), particularly language transfer.

What is immediately clear from the research on language transfer is the fact that it is almost impossible for anyone to totally eliminate aspects of

L1 transfer from their L2 pronunciation of English. A more developed awareness of the neurological processes involved in language transfer has brought a new understanding of the limitations involved. However, it has also brought a new source of strength. In the past, pronunciation difficulties were deemed to be the result of the 'interference' of L1 habits preventing the acquisition of the new L2 habits. The impetus in teaching was to 'get rid of' or 'reduce' the offending features. Now, teachers can employ their knowledge of the processes involved in language transfer to help learners acquire the L2 through lessons in comparison and awareness. Teachers know that they can activate prior knowledge structures, sound categories and the approximation solutions that the L1 language offers.

### **Factors Influencing the Transfer Process**

SLA research has thrown light on the complex factors at work when somebody sets about learning a new language. Some of the processes for L2 acquisition may be identical to L1 acquisition and have shown themselves to be *universal processes* in language learning. Others are influenced by *developmental factors*, such as articulatory development, and the speed and efficiency of L2 acquisition can depend on factors such as age and cognitive experience. The process of language transfer is considerably affected by the role played by *habit formation and automaticity* in L1 language acquisition and by *cognitive factors* relating to perceptions of L1-L2 similarity. Less critically, *stylistic and contextual factors* play a role in determining the extent of phonological transfer.

#### *Universal processes*

Certain linguistic processes, preferences and constraints have been found to be true for all language learning, whether L1 or L2. It is possible to predict the order of acquisition of certain language features by English L1 learners and to see the same order of acquisition in L2 learners (Jacobson 1968). They are related to innate processes deriving from human perceptual and articulatory forces. For example, there appears to be a

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universal preference across languages of the C-V (consonant-vowel) syllable (Tarone 1998:78). There is also a near-universal avoidance of consonant clusters by deleting or by epenthesis (vowel addition). English is one of few languages that has consonant clusters. English L1 children will begin by using the above-mentioned strategies before they master the difficulties of pronouncing consonant clusters and L2 learners will display a variety of strategies for coping with their pronunciation based on their own L1 rules. Japanese speakers of English, for example, employ epenthesis. Another universally difficult aspect of English is the pair of dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/. Similarly, the use of the schwa paragoge and devoicing are universal linguistic tendencies.

#### *Developmental processes*

Developmental processes can be seen to be at work in the way /θ/ and /ð/ are acquired both by L1 children and L2 learners of English. They are the sounds mastered last and substituted most frequently in L1 children's linguistic development (Schmidt 1977:367). This suggests that the unfamiliarity of these sounds (seldom found in other languages) is not the only factor hindering an L2 speaker's acquisition of them. Articulatory and linguistic developmental factors are also involved. It is possible, therefore, to conclude that advanced L2 learners, irrespective of their L1, can succeed in overcoming the pronunciation difficulty just as L1 children do.

The findings of research on L2 accent and rhythm to date lean towards the conclusion that adults who already have the cognitive experience of their L1 pronunciation to bring to their learning of the L2 language, will not succeed in acquiring a native-like accent unless they undergo extensive natural exposure. Age difference has something to do with this developmental aspect of the learning. Children process the rhythm, pitch and tone of what they hear through the right hemisphere of their brain and acquire these features through an automative process. Adults process the information through the left side, where cognitive rather than automative

processes have already developed from their L1 learning experience.

### *Habit formation and automaticity*

The nature of the speech process itself leads to the formation of habits. Once the stage of learning cognitively to recognize and categorize the features of the L1 language is complete, the process involves the development of highly automatized motor skills. These are very difficult to override in L2. This is especially true in unattended speech (Faerch and Kasper 1986:60). The conclusion for EIL pedagogy is that it would be a waste of time to change these habits unless intelligibility was at stake. Where it is necessary then the automative nature of the learning suggests that drilling reassumes importance in the pronunciation class.

Habit formation in language transfer is more significant at the phonological level than at the syntactic or lexical levels. When one sound in the L2 is perceived as being the same as something in the L1, then automatically the transfer from the familiar L1 sound to the L2 sound is made. The speaker is hardly aware of his/her misperception.

### *Cognitive factors: perceptions of L1-L2 similarity*

SLA research has shown that learning an L2 language does differ from learning an L1 language from birth. Learners use their cognitive skills to perceive resemblances between the L1 and L2 sounds. They use their previously learned sound library to process, both receptively and productively, the L2 sounds. This is “a basic, if not *the* basic, SLA learning strategy” (Selinker 1992:260). Whilst this is seen as useful—especially so in the case of reception, it is also a contributor to the “fossilization” of a language learner’s errors. In fact, new sounds seem to be acquired more accurately than those with an approximate counterpart in the L1 (Flege and Hillenbrand 1984:198). This is the problem with the Japanese failure to distinguish between the English /l/ and /r/ which are two separate phonemes in English but not in Japanese.

Whilst approximation is a useful force that EIL does its utmost to



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harness in cases where intelligibility is not hampered, a problem arises in EIL which could be termed the "Chinese whisper phenomenon". While one L1 transfer may seem to be an acceptable approximation, it is then in turn perceived as 'belonging' to a completely different phoneme category in another listener's respective L1. This is a threat to intelligibility, particularly when minimal pairs are involved and one word is perceived as a totally different word. Spanish and Japanese confusion between boat/vote is one example. Hence, EIL proponents such as Jenkins isolate such instances and emphasise the importance of teaching target-like production for such sounds. The EIL argument is that in pronunciation classes there is a need for work in certain areas rather than across the whole system. This also illustrates the need for the learner to understand his or her own L1 pronunciation system and to be able to compare and contrast it to the English system.

#### *Stylistic and contextual factors and other considerations*

It has been shown that phonological transfer decreases in formal situations and increases in less formal ones since all speakers naturally pay more attention to form in a formal situation (and employ 'citation' mode) and less attention in casual situations (unattended mode). This is true for L1 and L2 speakers. In the case of L2 speakers it means that in casual situations the incidence of errors of pronunciation goes up (Schmidt). The context is therefore relevant to the production of accurate sound.

Ambiguity is another contextual hazard affecting L2-L2 communication. The lack of a shared background and the fact that the medium of communication is a foreign language means that clarity of expression becomes particularly important. Learners do, however, demonstrate strategies to recover meaning. Uncertainty is another factor to take into account: learners are unsure they heard right since English is not their language.

Conclusions drawn from studies in language transfer are that a huge degree of effort goes into replacing a transferred form. Many, such as Ioup see transfer and the resulting approximations as a central factor

in L2 language learning (Ioup 1984:13). It is a deep-rooted automative reaction and so learners should not be expected to be able to over-ride it. It may only be possible to go as far as bringing it to the learner's attention and expecting that they will only acquire it with exposure over time. Only in areas where it could cause a potential intelligibility breakdown should the effort be made to teach it actively.

### **Proposals for a Phonology of English as an International Language: a Normative Endeavour**

There has been a long history of endeavour to establish a standardized framework for the phonology of English. Hockett (1958) sought to describe a pronunciation core that reconciled native speaker varieties. Jenner (1989) was one of the first to argue that many learners did not want or need to achieve a 'native-like standard of pronunciation, and he assembled a list of pronunciation teaching priorities for non-native-speaker (NNS) learners of English which "would offer the learner a guarantee of intelligibility and acceptability anywhere in the world".

What has changed in recent times is that, whereas Jenner was still using the native speaker receiver as his point of reference for the criteria of intelligibility, now it is considered unrealistic to think in these terms. Instead, new work is being done on establishing what consists of mutual intelligibility between NBESs (Non Bilingual English Speakers—Jenkins' term) (see also Graddol 1997). Jenner is now attempting to identify and describe what he calls "International English"—a single underlying phonological system that governs all the varieties of spoken English (1997a). His system, as far as it has been elucidated to date, does not contain schwa.

Ufomata has explored the variations on the basic RP theme (1990). Bhatia speaks out for recognition of nativized L2 forms of English and an acceptance of plurality of norms (the idea of a polymodel superstructure). Bamgbose (1998) takes a 'pluricentric' approach to the matter—accept all the varieties because of their common origin and common processes in the L2

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learning process. Crystal's predicted World Standard Spoken English (WSSE) is influenced by American English but incorporates elements of various L2 varieties. Gimson, who, in 1978, devised the Rudimentary International Pronunciation (RIP) based on RP, argues that an international standard would have to be a contrived one and he is not sure it would work or be accepted—particularly by the native English speaker.

Jenkins' *Lingua Franca Core* (2000) provides as skeletal a set of rules as possible in order to guide teachers as to what must not be left out of the pronunciation syllabus, rather than to prescribe what must be included. She ascribes to the belief that pronunciation teaching needs to show tolerance of the various L1 and L2 models to which learners have access. Furthermore, in Jenkins' scheme, it is important not to consider L2 language transfer features as 'erroneous'.

A study of Jenkins' proposals illustrates the problems inherent in attempting to provide a prescriptive 'standard', however inclusive that standard may be. Whilst advocating the concept of native-speaker *model* rather than native-speaker *norm*, Jenkins' L. F. C. is still a set of rules and, as a set of rules is, in the final analysis, a normative endeavour. Many of her recommendations are controversial in that she pares down English pronunciation to the bone. She effectively preaches the elimination of some of its most distinctive segmental features. In her effort to simplify the rules of intonation, she avoids many of the suprasegmental features which may indeed be not strictly necessary for international intelligibility, but which give the language a natural rhythm. From the production perspective, the suprasegmental features of a language prevent the monotony of speaking like a robot. This is not just a question of aesthetics, but a question of comfort. It is not comfortable to be speaking permanently in citation mode. In this regard, it goes against the fundamentally natural processes of language development. From a reception perspective, to avoid learning the suprasegmental features of a language means that the listener will not understand a large proportion of internationally proliferated L1 content.

## Jenkins' "Lingua Franca Core"

Jenkins presents her recommendations for EIL pronunciation as an attempt to "scale down the phonological task for the majority of learners". Jenkins defines her LFC as a "polymodel approach". The guiding principles are "pragmatism" and "functional realism". Pragmatism decides which pronunciation features are "relevant to EIL communication needs" and functional realism ascertains which are the most "realistic" aspects to teach in the classroom. The stated aim of establishing this core is to provide a set of guidelines that can be applied to the teaching and learning of L2 English, whatever the L1 language:

"The Lingua Franca Core is neither a pronunciation model nor a restricted, simplified core". Whilst "contrived" and "to some extent prescriptive" the LFC provides "far greater individual freedom" than previous approaches "by providing speakers with the scope both to express their own identities and to accommodate to their receivers."

The Lingua Franca Core is listed under five headings and is short enough to be quoted here in full:

### The Lingua Franca Core

From: *The Phonology of English as an International Language*. Jennifer Jenkins, Oxford, Oxford University Press. 2000. pp. 158—159.

According to the LFC, phonological error in EIL involves an error in producing any of the following (not in any order of priority):

- 1 The consonantal inventory with the following provisos:
  - rhotic [ɹ] rather than other varieties of /r/
  - intervocalic /t/ rather than [f]
  - most substitutions of /θ/, /ð/, and [ɹ] permissible
  - close approximations to core consonant sounds generally permissible

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- certain approximations not permissible (i. e. where there is a risk that they will be heard as a different consonant sound from that intended)
- 2 Phonetic requirements:
  - aspiration following the fortis plosives /p/, /t/ and /k/
  - fortis/lenis differential effect on preceding vowel length
- 3 Consonant clusters:
  - initial clusters not simplified
  - medial and final clusters simplified only according to L1 rules of elision
- 4 Vowel sounds:
  - maintenance of vowel length contrasts
  - L2 regional qualities permissible if consistent, but /ɜ:/ to be preserved
- 5 Nuclear stress production and placement and division of speech stream into word groups.

## **The EIL Lingua Franca Core and Japanese Speakers**

If we apply Jenkins' recommendations to the teaching of pronunciation to Japanese speakers, what would be the result? There follows below a discussion of the points of most concern in the case of Japanese speakers.

### **Segmental Issues**

The most recent trend in EFL methodological theory has been to promote the recognition and production of the supra-segmental aspects of English. It has been popular to assert that the mispronunciation of segmentals is less important for overall intelligibility than a failure to produce and recognize aspects of supra-segmentals (Brown 1991). Jenkins goes against this trend and refocuses attention on the segmentals, in line with Van Els and De Bot (1987). However, whereas the latter stress the need to recognize the interdependence of both aspects (see also Brazil 1994), Jenkins emphasizes *a priori* the importance of teaching the segmentals for the purpose of EIL.

## *Consonants*

From Jenkins' analyses of ILT miscommunication, she has concluded that it is important to stay close to most of the original consonant sounds of English, to avoid loss of intelligibility through confluents, substitution and elisions. Learner difficulties, therefore, need to be overcome rather than tolerated. Japanese speakers have few problems with most of the consonant sounds of English. However, where they do have difficulties, the possibility of miscommunication is very high, since the consonants that they mispronounce create a confusion over minimal pairs involving /b/ and /v/ and /r/ and /l/. The pronunciation of /w/ as /ɔ/ is less significant as a source of ILT miscommunication.

It is clear that, in the Japanese case, priority needs to be given to the problem of production and reception of /l/ and /r/ which is experienced not only by Japanese speakers of English but also by Chinese and other L1 Asian speakers. A Japanese speaker of English needs to learn how to recognize and produce 'r' as a post-alveolar approximant /ɹ/ and /l/ as a clear /l/ in contrast to recognizing only the flap /ɾ/ from their L1 knowledge. This is probably the most difficult problem to overcome for Japanese speakers. It is a clear example of how language transfer can impede rather than facilitate learning.

However, Jenkins' choice of the General American (G. A.) rhotic /ɹ/ as the standard pronunciation of /r/ actually creates new problems for Japanese speakers. The rhotic pronunciation involves the pronunciation of the /r/ in final position as well as in initial and medial positions. In R. P. the /r/ in the spelling in words such as 'car', 'ever' or 'here' and even in medial positions such as in the word 'hard', would not be pronounced. However, in GA and some other accents such as Scottish, the /r/ sound is articulated. In order to articulate the final /r/ sound, the Japanese strategy would be to add an extra /u/ sound, rather than using a wide, lengthened /a/, which is the natural strategy evolved from the RP pronunciation. /CA/ would become /CARU/. The recommendation to produce a rhotic r is puzzling in that it contradicts the universal tendency in all languages

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towards CV syllables. It might be expected that pronouncing it would be difficult for other L1 speakers too.

Based on the premise that “where a feature of the L2 is widely unteachable, it becomes irrelevant to EIL” Jenkins (133) concludes that the distinctively English voiced and unvoiced ‘th’ sound should not be taught. Her argument is that the dental fricative pair, /θ/ and /ð/ are very difficult to learn since they do not occur in most other languages and, in her own research, approximations did not cause miscommunication (Jenkins 2000:137). She argues that there exist a great variety of L1 strategies to cope with the ‘th’ sound: /f/, /v/, or the dental plosives [t̪] and [d̪] (Pennington 1996:65). Most of the L2 approximations are also acceptable in her view: /s/ and /z/ or /ʃ/ and /ðʒ/ as used by Japanese speakers.

The point Jenkins makes about these approximants, however, highlights an issue that should not be overlooked when considering the validity of such a concept as a standard form of English as an International Language. Familiarity is a vitally important aspect of the ‘intelligibility’ framework. Exposure to a particular nationality of L2 English dictates the level of intelligibility of the substitution strategies they use. Jenkins hesitates over the Japanese /ʃ/ and /ðʒ/ substitutions for /θ/ and /ð/ since they are, at present at least, “restricted in use and, thus, less familiar to all EIL receivers”. Whereas a teacher in Japan would have tolerance for the l/r confusion and compensate automatically, intelligibility might be greatly impaired for a Spaniard who has never met a Japanese before.

In standardization training for the RSA/UCLES English exams, examiners in Japan are often surprised at how negatively the examiners based in the UK evaluate Japanese and other Asian speakers. This is to do with their lack of familiarity with these particular language transfer and substitution strategies. A teacher or a learner of English, then, cannot be expected to show ‘tolerance’ without ‘knowledge’—that is, without having been taught or without having experienced examples of other L1-influenced L2 English pronunciations. If a wide variety of L1-influenced sub-

stitutions for /θ/ and /ð/ are permitted and if teachers do not even teach an awareness of the target pronunciation, intelligibility does indeed risk being compromised. And if the tolerance that years of research has brought to linguists is to become commonplace, all the varieties of L1 pronunciation need to be taught. To do so, however destroys the aim of reducing the phonological load for the learner of English.

The issue of ‘acceptability’ is also worth discussing at this point. Jenkins mentions the ‘responses of irritation’ with regard to the German substitution, /z/. This illustrates the point that a listener’s reaction to certain off-target substitutions will be grounded not so much in subjective likes and dislikes but in cultural and linguistic associations which are not easy to gloss over. The German “baddie” in the war films using /z/ instead of /ð/ has become a stereotypical image that sticks in the mind not only of native speakers of English.

The approach to the ‘th’ pronunciation mentioned above is bound to be controversial. Taking the argument beyond ‘conservative’ objections, however, it has to be pointed out that there is no reason why unfamiliar phonology cannot be learned. Jenkins herself acknowledges that the ‘exotic’ nature of certain sounds makes them teachable. Research has shown that whereas it can be difficult to override a pre-categorized sound it is often easier to learn and categorize a completely new sound. For this very reason, ‘th’ is teachable. Whilst automatic habits may lead to frequent pronunciation slips in unattended speech, a taught awareness of the target sound will allow for quick recovery of intelligibility. By teaching the target sound, misunderstandings, whether serious or merely funny, can indeed be avoided. To avoid teaching the target sounds /θ/ and /ð/ leads only to greater confusion. Two examples of minimal pair confusion are: faith/face (Roach 204) and width/wits. Or, in combination with other Japanese language transfer features, the word ‘feather’ becomes ‘feza’ and a sentence about feathers could end up sounding like this: “I want to put za fezazu in wiz zeezu shinguzu”.

Consonant cluster simplification is a common feature in L2 English.



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The Japanese habit of epenthesis—adding vowels to the consonants—is deemed by Jenkins to be far less of a threat to intelligibility than the Chinese speaker’s habit of deleting consonants: “Indeed, epenthesis may even serve to clarify the consonants it follows and thus increase intelligibility for a less than fluent listener”. It is my contention that, on the contrary, epenthesis is the most significant factor in making Japanese English difficult to understand for anyone, native or L2 receiver, who does not know the rules of the Japanese ‘katakana’ syllabic writing and pronunciation system. For any teacher of Japanese speakers it is important to know that while the pronunciation of consonant clusters is obviously difficult because the Japanese syllable only ever consists of a simple CV construction, the habit is reinforced by the spelling of foreign loan words using the katakana script, which itself cannot accommodate the existence of consonant clusters. If a Japanese learner is not taught an awareness of the clusters and the limitations of his/her own katakana script to represent them orthographically, he or she will not be intelligible to other L2 listeners and will need lengthy exposure before being able to produce clusters accurately. In other words, since epenthesis is a particularly Japanese ‘construction’ of English, it is something they *need* to be actively taught to escape.

Jenkins’ basic rule that initial clusters must not be simplified but medial and final ones can be, according to L1 rules of elision, does nothing to help the Japanese speaker. Elision is not an option in the Japanese L1. Since elision does not take place—only epenthesis—a Japanese speaker would normally say ‘ku-rei-da-ru’ for ‘cradle’. ‘Kreidaru’ would not be a significant improvement, even assuming that the speaker could learn to use the cluster in initial position. In the case of the word ‘smart’ a Japanese must be taught to pronounce the ‘sm’ cluster but ‘ru’ and ‘to’ would remain. ‘Smaruto’ is not much better than ‘su-ma-ru-to’.

### *Vowels*

With regard to vowels, Jenkins argues that L1-influenced vowel substitutions are mostly acceptable for the very reason that by maintaining

the 'quality' (articulation) of the L1 vowel sounds, a speaker will at least be 'consistent' and a listener can develop a tolerance towards the approximations. On the same principle, she makes no prescriptions as to the use of the schwa. The only substitution singled out as impermissible is, unfortunately, the main Japanese substituting vowel /ɑ:/, when it is used to substitute /ɜ:/. The /ɑ:/ vowel is invariably used by Japanese speakers to replace a wide range of English vowel sounds, including schwa. In most cases this substitution is acceptable. In the case of /ɜ:/, however, intelligibility is compromised. Jenkins singles out some examples: 'Bird' is pronounced /bɑ:d/ instead of /bɜ:d/, which sounds like 'bad'. 'Curtain' sounds like 'carton' and 'birthplace' sounds like 'bathplace'. The quality of the vowel /ɜ:/ therefore, is the only one that Jenkins stipulates as needing to be specifically taught. The Japanese speaker's pronunciation hence appears to be the furthest removed from any concept of a standard EIL, implying that Japanese learners have more pronunciation work to do than most.

### **Suprasegmental Issues**

Questions relating to the teaching of suprasegmentals are the same for Japanese L2 English speakers as for other nationalities. The EIL approach to suprasegmentals is a reversal of the most current thinking in pronunciation teaching and is centered on the debate about whether to teach them or not. Currently, it is common to argue that a mistake at the segmental level is less important for intelligibility than at the suprasegmental level and teachers are recommended to concentrate on teaching the features of connected speech such as weak forms (the reduction of vowels to schwa), elision, assimilation, rhythm, word stress and intonation. It is argued that until a learner can recognize these features he will not be able to follow normal fluent speech even if he is well versed in the production and recognition of individual sounds.

In EIL, however, the emphasis is on the fact that the suprasegmental aspects of speech actually block intelligibility for non-native speakers.

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Ironically, the fluent native speaker becomes the *least* intelligible speaker of English. Whilst Jenkins claims that the LFC establishes a balance in priorities, it is clear from its prescriptions that suprasegmentals are relegated to a less important position. They are considered to be 'unteachable' in the classroom and it is recommended that they be taught only to students who make a conscious decision that they want or need to learn them. For example, the attitudinal function of intonation is deemed to be something that students can learn only from 'exposure' and not through teacher intervention. Teaching about pitch changes is considered to be "not feasible" and Jenkins advocates that if suprasegmentals are to be taught at all, they should only be taught "receptively". Is it really possible to teach only receptively, given that practice and repetition are part of the cognitive processes a learner goes through in order to internalise the language?

Whilst word stress is acknowledged as being important to L1 English receivers, the rules are considered "too complex" to teach and not necessarily an obstacle to intelligibility for ILT communication, according to the results of Jenkins' data. With regard to sentence stress, Jenkins points to the recent questioning of the concept of stress-timed languages (Ladefoged, Roach, Cauldwell) and recommends simply concentrating on teaching students to lengthen the stressed (nuclear) syllables for intonation.

Nuclear sentence stress has an accentual function and is the only aspect of intonation that Jenkins recommends teaching. 'Unmarked' nuclear stress is when the last content word in the group of words is stressed. 'Contrastive', or 'marked' nuclear stress is when the stress comes somewhere else in the word group. In the English language the function of such stress is as a highlighter in the absence of inflections and with the limited options in word order. The speaker highlights his meaning by where he chooses to put the stress. Jenkins' data revealed that many of her sample L2 speakers had acquired a receptive awareness of the accentual function of such stress but that they were not able to produce it correctly themselves. She concludes that since the rules for nuclear stress are simple to teach

and because it operates on a conscious level to highlight meaning, the rewards for creating an awareness of L1-L2 differences are high.

In addition, nuclear stress is important in this version of EIL because weak forms are another feature that Jenkins prefers to omit. Nuclear stress “foregrounds” the important part of the message in a stream of speech where no reductions of vowels are made. Weak forms are traditionally described as being a means of ‘reducing’ or, to continue the metaphor, ‘backgrounding’ the less important parts of the sentence. Weak forms are important for a stress-timed language in that the reduction to schwa permits the shortening of the vowel so that the words can be ‘squashed’ to fit into the rhythm of the sentence. However, in Jenkins’ view, even when weak forms are taught “learning rarely follows”. She claims that most L2 speakers use no more than the weak forms of ‘a’ and ‘the’. Moreover, she maintains that most L2 speakers never reach the speed of speaking that requires the employment of weak forms and other features of connected speech. For EIL, Jenkins follows Jenner in recommending that schwa is not taught and that the vowel quality—target or approximation—can be retained.

Jenkins’ recommendations with regard to suprasegmentals appear radical. She is suggesting that it is not necessary to produce many of the aspects of connected speech. She bases her argument on the fact that rhythm and intonation, elision and weak forms hinder intelligibility for the L2 receiver and that they are ‘unteachable in the classroom. However, she highlights the limitations of her argument by asserting that these features should be left to natural “exposure”. This must surely mean exposure to ‘natural’ models. This brings us back to the very traditional dilemmas faced by L2 speakers—the need to hear fluent, native speaker models in context.

Fortunately, L2 learners can come into contact more frequently and more easily with fluent L1 speakers through the medium of television and the internet as well in international business and education. At a time when exposure to fluent ENL, ESL and EFL speakers has never been

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easier, it seems strange to actually attempt to prescribe such an unnatural simplification of the suprasegmental aspects of the English language. In SLA the mastering of suprasegmentals is a sign of progression from a mastering of the segmentals through practice and exposure to suitable models. Even if students take many years to be able to use these features effectively, they would have much greater difficulties acquiring them if they had never been taught an awareness of them in class. And though recent experiments suggest that the rules we have been teaching for suprasegmental features are not actually consistently followed by native speakers, this does not mean they are not useful guidelines.

Whilst it may be acceptable to argue that suprasegmentals are not essential, it is another thing altogether to prescribe an EIL core that does away with them. This, in effect introduces an artificial language. Jenkins recognizes how far such a core takes the speaker from 'real' English when she envisages the time "when L1 speakers of English also take lessons in EIL". To teach an EIL devoid of the features that make speech 'fluent' rather than stilted restricts the learner to L2-L2 face-to-face communication and blocks his access to the common core of knowledge which is filtered internationally through the medium of English.

## **Conclusion**

To create a core set of guidelines for English as an International Language is a normative, prescriptive endeavour. As such, it faces significant challenges. The greatest challenge is to process the vast body of knowledge on the huge variety of language transfer strategies and to crystallize this knowledge into a manageable set of rules that will make up the phonological English core. On top of that, there is still a lack of data for non-native speaker interaction so that it is difficult to be certain where the intelligibility swamps are. The task of examining the intelligibility of reception and production across the range of L1 speakers is enormous. Finally, the aim of making EIL simpler is severely

compromised if all speakers are expected to be aware of the language transfer strategies of any and all L2 speakers of English.

The rejection of any single or combined 'live' model of English pronunciation is perhaps the weak point of the EIL lobby. Crystal's American model is the most realistic in this regard (Crystal 1997). It must be said that at this stage, the most useful contributions to the notion of an internationally intelligible form of English still come, not from EIL itself, but from the fields of Second Language Acquisition and the study of interlanguage talk and L1 language transfer. Lessons learned from ILT research help teachers to increase their awareness of the most salient aspects affecting intelligibility in L2-L2 situations. Specific research on the language transfer strategies from individual L1 languages help teachers to create an awareness in their students of the nature of their own language's phonology and to compare it to English. Following these avenues is perhaps a more constructive way of arriving at a convergence of sorts.

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