

## Global English and the teaching of pronunciation

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The emergence of so many different kinds (or 'varieties') of international English has caused a number of linguists to question the use of native speaker pronunciation models in the teaching of English. This article presents my research into the pronunciation of global English and gives some teaching implications.

### What is global English?

The term 'global English' is being used increasingly nowadays. It is a means of demonstrating that English is spoken in every part of the world, both among speakers within a particular country who share a first language, and across speakers from different countries/first languages.

English is no longer spoken only by its native speakers in the UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and by those who learn English in order to communicate with native speakers. It is also spoken among non-native speakers within countries like India, the Philippines and Singapore and internationally among non-native speakers from a wide range of countries/first languages throughout the world. This last use of English is often referred to as 'English as an International Language' or EIL, and it is this kind of English which we will focus on here as it is the largest group of English speakers, numbering around 1.5 billion.

### What are the implications of EIL for pronunciation?

The emergence of so many different kinds (or 'varieties') of international English has caused a number of linguists to question the use of native speaker pronunciation models in the teaching of English. Their argument is that native speaker accents are not necessarily the most intelligible or appropriate accents when a non-native speaker is communicating with another non-native speaker.

As regards intelligible pronunciation for EIL, we need to identify which pronunciation features are crucial for mutual understanding when a non-native speaker of English talks to another non-native speaker and which are not at all important. These are often not the same features that are crucial and unimportant for a native speaker of English

### The findings from research

In my research I analysed interactions between non-native speakers of English. The aim was to find out which features of British/American English pronunciation are essential for intelligible pronunciation, and which are not. The findings have been formed into a pronunciation core for teaching which is known as the Lingua Franca Core. This is to indicate that it is intended as a guide for lingua franca interactions, not interactions between a native and non-native speaker of English. The main features of the Lingua Franca Core are...

- All the consonants are important except for 'th' sounds as in 'thin' and 'this'
- Consonant clusters are important at the beginning and in the middle of words. For example, the cluster in the word 'string' cannot be simplified to 'sting' or 'tring' and remain intelligible.
- The contrast between long and short vowels is important. For example, the difference between the vowel sounds in 'sit' and 'seat'
- Nuclear (or tonic) stress is also essential. This is the stress on the most important word (or syllable) in a group of words. For example, there is a difference in meaning between 'My son uses a COMputer' which is a neutral statement of fact and 'My SON has a computer', where there is an added meaning (such as that another person known to the speaker and listener does not use a computer).

On the other hand, many other items which are regularly taught on English pronunciation courses appear not to be essential for intelligibility in EIL interactions. These are...

- The 'th' sounds (see above)
- Vowel quality, that is, the difference between vowel sounds where length is not involved, e.g. a German speaker may pronounce the 'e' in the word 'chess' more like an 'a' as in the word 'cat'.
- Weak forms such as the words 'to', 'of' and 'from' whose vowels are often pronounced as schwa instead of with their full quality
- Other features of connected speech such as assimilation (where the final sound of a word alters to make it more like the first sound of the next word, so that, e.g. 'red paint' becomes 'reb paint')
- Word stress
- Pitch movement
- Stress timing

All these things are said to be important for a native speaker listener either because they aid intelligibility or because they are thought to make an accent more appropriate.

### **What are the implications for pronunciation teaching?**

- Students should be given choice. That is, when students are learning English so that they can use it in international contexts with other non-native speakers from different first languages, they should be given the choice of acquiring a pronunciation that is more relevant to EIL intelligibility than traditional pronunciation syllabuses offer. Up to now, the goal of pronunciation teaching has been to enable students to acquire an accent that is as close as possible to that of a native speaker. But for EIL communication, this is not the most intelligible accent and some of the non-core items may even make them less intelligible to another non-native speaker.
- The non-core items are not only unimportant for intelligibility but also socially more appropriate. After all, native speakers have different accents depending on the region where they were born and live. So why should non-native speakers of an international language not be allowed to do the same?
- Finally, students should be given plenty of exposure in their pronunciation classrooms to other non-native accents of English so that they can understand them easily even if a speaker has not yet managed to acquire the core features. For EIL, this is much more important than having classroom exposure to native speaker accents.