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Clearly speaking
Pronunciation in action in the classroom

Presenters: Anne Burns
Stephanie Claire

Introduction

The comparatively recent recognition of EIL (English as an International Language) brings with it an understanding that areas of focus for pronunciation differ in the various contexts of EFL and ESL. In this workshop, we look at the extent to which teachers need to be aware of the differing contexts in which their students may use the English they have learned. The aims of the workshop are to explore the scope, nature and features of pronunciation and the implications for English language teaching.

1 The contexts of English language teaching

English as a Second Language (ESL)

The teaching of English to people who are living in an English-speaking country, but whose first language is not English

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

The teaching of English to people whose first language is not English, and who do not live in an English-speaking country

English as an International Language (EIL)

The teaching of English to people whose first language is not English, who use English as a lingua franca

Question

Which context(s) do you see yourself as working in?

2 The *traditional* or mainstream approach to pronunciation teaching

Today, non-native speakers of English vastly outnumber native-speakers.

Increasing numbers of people whose first language (L1) is not English are using English to communicate with others whose first language is not English.

Pronunciation teaching, in general, still encourages learners to approximate their speech as closely as possible to a *native speaker* (NS) model.

Decisions as to what to include in syllabuses are usually still grounded in native speaker (NS) intuitions, despite the fact that these may be inaccurate, eg: stress-timing and pitch movement in Yes/No questions.

Even where the intuitions are correct, they are based on intelligibility for NS receivers, without any suggestion that intelligibility for non-native speakers might make different demands. The focus appears to be predominantly on what native speakers do when they communicate with other native speakers, with an assumption that communications between non-native speakers should operate smoothly along the same lines.

Learners are therefore encouraged to adopt features of NS English such as elisions, contractions, assimilation and weak forms, regardless of their often negative effect on intelligibility for their non-native speaker (NNS) interlocutors.

Question

To what extent does this situation and approach represent the reality of your teaching context?

3 The EIL perspective on teaching and learning pronunciation

Today, however, there is a growing consensus of opinion among language acquisition researchers that the *traditional* NS pronunciation target is:

- difficult - if not impossible - for adult learners to achieve
- unrealistic, in view of the fact that communication is likely to occur far more often among people using English as a lingua franca than between non-native speakers and native speakers

Researchers such as Jennifer Jenkins (2002) believe that language teaching would benefit if more attention were paid to the L2 user rather than the native-speaker receiver.

In Jenkins's view, this would result in a number of changes in the way pronunciation is taught, with the aim of making the pronunciation of non-native speakers more intelligible and comprehensible to all interlocutors, regardless of their background.

The effects of this approach would be:

- 1 greater promotion of intelligibility and regional appropriateness among EIL interlocutors
- 2 the creation of a more *teachable* option as opposed to the current native-speaker model
- 3 support and development of learners' *accommodation skills*, ie: their ability to adjust their pronunciation to bring it closer to that of people with whom they are interacting.

Jenkins identifies a number of aspects of English which:

- threaten EIL speakers' intelligibility to others and their own comprehension
- are not crucial to intelligibility, but which receive considerable attention in a *traditional* pronunciation syllabus.

Jenkins also advocates the exposure of learners to a wide range of regional varieties of NS English and NNS English.

In the context of EIL, a speaker's pronunciation *must be intelligible and acceptable to the target international (and therefore predominantly NNS) English speaking community.*

(Jenkins 2002: 84)

Question

To what extent does current teaching in your workplace recognise the EIL perspective?

4 A proposed model for EIL pronunciation teaching and learning

Jenkins studied a group of upper-intermediate to low-advanced level learners in the UK. She found that five categories proved most problematic for these learners when interacting with each other:

- 1 consonant sounds eg: *I pinish for I finish*
- 2 tonic stress eg: *I smoke more than you DO*
- 3 vowels eg: *barthplace for birthplace*
- 4 misplaced tonic stress + consonant substitution eg:
Have you got a blue VUN? for Have you got a blue one?
- 5 vowel length + consonant substitution eg:
Don rise a fiz of skoo for don't raise the school fees

When both participants are non-native speakers, they tend to focus on what they hear rather than on other contextual and co-textual information. And context and co-text do not provide much help in clarifying meaning.

Non-native speakers do show an ability, however, to work out which aspects of their speech are proving problematic to listeners and do attempt to modify these more towards the target language sounds.

Learners, therefore, need training in how to make their speech intelligible in EIL contexts.

Jenkins's article provides a proposal for EIL pronunciation teaching and a table of the main differences between EIL and native speaker targets.

Discussion

In groups, discuss Jenkins's research findings.

What points emerge from it that are relevant to the type of teaching you are or will be involved in?

5 EIL and Thailand

Thailand is a country with a great tourist industry, where English is used as a lingua franca by international tourists.

For this reason alone, intelligible pronunciation and ability to comprehend a wide range of English pronunciation is an important issue.

As Pomrat's (1998) survey of 39 Thai tourist police and their problems using English vocabulary found:

- The different accents of the tourists from different countries make it difficult for the Thai police to understand.
- The Thai tourist police have difficulty with English pronunciation.

According to Swan and Smith (1987), some of the more common features of a Thai accent in English are:

- stress on final syllable of words
- problems in articulating certain final consonants and consonant clusters
- a staccato effect, resulting from:
 - a) a tendency to assign tones to syllables
 - b) a tendency to give equal weight and timing to each syllable
 - c) glottal stops before initial vowels
 - d) insertion of a short neutral vowel (schwa /ə/) between certain initial consonant clusters
 - e) reduction of consonant clusters at the end of words to single consonants

Interestingly, several of these features correspond with features identified by Jenkins as ones that proved most problematic for learners when interacting with each other in an EIL context.

Many of the assimilatory features of the *traditional* pronunciation approach, such as elisions, contractions, assimilation and weak forms are focused on simply because these features are facts of NS pronunciation.

6 Jenkins's core items for an EIL syllabus

Consonants

- full vowel sounds rather than weak forms as full vowel sounds tend to help rather than hinder intelligibility
- some substitutions of /θ/ and /ð/ are acceptable because they are intelligible in EIL
- British English /t/ between vowels in words such as *latter*, and *water* rather than the American English flapped /r/
- allophonic variation within phonemes permissible as long as the pronunciation does not overlap into another phoneme
eg: /v/ sounding like /b/ is not permissible
- aspiration following word-initial voiceless stops /p/, /t/ and /k/ , otherwise these stops sound like their voiced counterparts /b/, /d/ and /g/

Consonant clusters

- no omission of sounds in word-initial clusters eg: *promise*
- omission of middle and final clusters only permissible in terms of English L1 pronunciation
eg: for *factsheet* - *facsheet* is permitted but not *fatsheet* or *factheet*
- addition of schwa is acceptable in a cluster, whereas omission of a consonant is not

Vowel sounds

- maintenance of contrast between long and short vowels
- L2 regional qualities acceptable except in the case of /ɜ:/ as in *bird*, which regularly causes problems

Production and placement of tonic stress

- appropriate use of contrastive stress to signal meaning

Questions

Which of the above features cause problems for your students?

How do you address these problems?

Finally, the point is made that learners need EIL practice to assist in the development of their accommodation skills in relation to a wide range of different L1 interlocutor groups and to be able to respond quickly to interlocutor incomprehension by adjusting their pronunciation.

Bibliography

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Abbreviations used in this presentation

ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an international Language
NS	native English speaker
NNS	non-Native English speaker
L1	first language
L2	second/other language

Handout

Jenkins, J. (2002). A sociolinguistically based, empirically researched pronunciation syllabus for English as an International language. In *Applied Linguistics* 23/1: 83 – 103.



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