World Englishes and the Challenge of Teaching Phonetics and Phonology at Higher Education Levels

Marina Grasso*
Daniela Martino**
Universidad Nacional de La Plata
Instituto de Formación Docente 97

Abstract

The growth of the use of English worldwide and its recognition as a lingua franca have questioned the appropriateness of certain instructional pronunciation models. As a consequence, the goals of teaching pronunciation have also been discussed. The increasing acceptance of many varieties of English and the diversity of contexts in which they are used as a successful communication tool seem to have shifted the focus from achieving native like pronunciation to giving priority to intelligibility. Teaching phonetics and phonology in higher education settings as part of teacher education and translation programmes enlarges the possibilities of developing the students' ability to adapt themselves to the changing reality of the global use of English. After considering the present contents and goals and pursued at the teaching of the phonetics of English to future specialists, this paper aims at sharing possible activities in an attempt to raise the students' awareness of the existence of diverse pronunciations heard in different parts of the world, eradicate the notion of the supremacy of an accent over others, analyze differences among Englishes spoken by people in the outer, inner and expanding circles and help learners develop the skills of perceiving peculiarities and understanding the language despite these differences.

Keywords: Englishes – pronunciation instruction – higher education level

World Englishes: Taking a stance

There is general agreement on the fact that the use of English has grown worldwide and that its recognition as a lingua franca is indisputable. Crystal's estimates from 2003 show that users of

---

* **Marina Grasso** graduated as a teacher of English from Universidad Nacional de La Plata and has an MA degree in ELT and Applied Linguistics from King's College, University of London, England. She worked as a teacher of English at different schools for over twenty years and has been an assistant in the Language Laboratory and assistant teacher of English Phonetics and Phonology I and II, subjects at the Teacher Training College and the English Translation Courses at the Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación (UNLP) for over twelve years now. Since 2003, she has been a member of the group ECAR (Español Coloquial de Argentina) and has participated in four research projects of the *Programa de Incentivos para la Docencia y la Investigación*. Contact: grassomarina@yahoo.com.ar

** **Daniela Martino** is a teacher of English and Sworn Translator (Universidad de La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina). She holds a Diploma in Education and ICT and is currently doing an MA in Technology-mediated Learning (Universidad de Córdoba, Argentina). She has been working as an EFL teacher at different levels for twenty years. She has also been an EFL pre-service teacher trainer, lecturing in Applied Phonetics since 2009. Her research interests include the integration of ICT in teaching programmes, particularly in the teaching of segmental and suprasegmental features of spoken English. Contact: dlmartino76@hotmail.com

English in countries within the expanding circle (500- 1,000 million) and the outer circle (300-500 million) outnumber by far users in inner circle countries (320-380 million). As a consequence of the increasing acceptance of many varieties of English and the diversity of contexts in which they are used as a successful communication tool, the 'ownership of English' has been brought into question and- in Vukanovic & Krstanovic's (2011:6) terms- has 'fostered the view that the language belongs to its users'. In the educational context, this has brought the question of the appropriateness of certain instructional pronunciation models and the discussion of the goals of teaching pronunciation to the fore. These issues become of primary importance in our higher education setting, where pronunciation plays a vital role for future teachers, translators and interpreters.

As far as the model is concerned, many put forward that if the language is used primarily by non-native speakers, a native speaker model might not be the most appropriate choice. Nonetheless, it should be noted that a model accent ought to satisfy a set of relevant criteria in order to be able to be a suitable candidate. We adopt Szpyra Kozłowska's (2018: 237) described below.

- It should be a standard variety, for questions of intelligibility, and it should not be socially stigmatized. Nonstandard accents might be restricted to small groups and might not be intelligible to many users within a given country and outside it.
- There should be teaching resources (textbooks, learner dictionaries, recordings, descriptions) readily available.
- It should be an accent that teachers can approximate.

This evidences that many varieties of English, though accepted as such and used by many speakers, fail to embody a pedagogically effective model due to the fact that they do not fulfill the conditions listed above. As regards the goals of teaching pronunciation, the focus seems to have shifted from achieving native-like pronunciation to giving priority to intelligibility. Already in 1956 Abercrombie states

I believe that pronunciation teaching should have, not a goal which must of necessity be normally an unrealized ideal, but a *limited*[1] purpose which will be completely fulfilled: the attainment of intelligibility. (page 37)

By 'comfortably intelligible pronunciation' the author means 'a pronunciation which can be understood with little or no conscious effort on the part of the listener' (íbid: 37) Nowadays, the concepts of intelligibility and comprehensibility are widely accepted (see Munro & Derwin (1995), Smith and Nelson (1985), Morley (1991), Jenkins (2000), Levis (2005), Pickering (2006), among many others), but still acknowledge that intelligibility has shades of objectivity that may vary from one speaker to another.

It is necessary to make the distinction between the model used for teaching and learning pronunciation and the learning goal- defined at the level needed in order to achieve effective communication (Rogerson-Revell 2011 in Low 2015). We believe that General British English[2] can serve the purpose of being an instructional model[3], taken as a point of reference from which other varieties can be described. Among the goals, we claim that the training of receptive skills should be particularly reinforced so that students are exposed to and get acquainted with a wider range of accents in order to interpret them better (Jenkins 1997).

Our aim is to share activities that attempt to

---

[1] Emphasis given by the author.

[2] We take Maidment's definition (2012 in Cruttenden 2014: 80) of General British English as 'the accent whose varieties are least associated with any specific areas of Great Britain. It is the most frequent model employed in the teaching of British English as an additional language'.

[3] We feel the need to emphasize that our choice of General British English by no means implies any ideological bias towards which model or standard of English to adopt.

- raise the students' awareness of the existence of diverse pronunciations heard in different parts of the world.
- eradicate the notion of the supremacy of an accent over others.
- analyze differences among Englishes spoken by people in the outer, inner and expanding circles (Kachru 1985) and help learners develop the skills of perceiving peculiarities and understanding the language despite these differences.

Enhancing students' awareness of English varieties

Kachru's model (íbid.) divides the spread of English in an international context in three circles: the inner circle includes those countries where English is predominantly spoken and where English is a native language (The United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia). The outer circle comprises multilingual countries where English receives an official status, is used in legal, administration and educational contexts but where there is a range of other languages spoken as well (India, Singapore, Nigeria). The expanding circle covers those countries where English is taught as a foreign language (China, Japan, Argentina). Considering Kachru's three circles of English, we will introduce activities to do with three different varieties, Australian, Nigerian and Japanese English, in order to compare them with the target variety chosen as a point of reference.

The activities devised aim at developing the 'under the radar' strategy (Sewell 2016) of prioritizing the most salient features presented in the descriptions in the literature available, selection which responds to characteristics that might interfere with the intelligibility to speakers of other varieties of English. The objective is also to foster students' reflection on the varieties chosen so as to help them communicate effectively within the numerous sociolinguistic environments they may eventually be faced with. For questions of space, the descriptions of such varieties are not given in this presentation but are reflected in the activities we have prepared ad-hoc. For the same reason, the teacher's introductions and the connection between each of the activities are not explicitly mentioned. Activities are shown as they would be presented to students in class, except that the expected answers have been included in bold type after each task.

Australian English[4]

1. Read the following joke[5]. What makes it funny? **(This phonological joke relates different word senses that sound alike. The patient misunderstands the nurse's question and interprets 'to die' as 'today', which in Australian English is pronounced with the wide closing diphthong /aɪ/ and in General British English is produced with the narrow closing diphthong /eɪ/)**

---

[4] The descriptions of Australian English were taken from Cox (2012).

[5] The original cartoon was taken from https://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/c/car_crash_victim.asp and the joke was found in
https://www.reddit.com/r/Jokes/comments/3dq0wk/a_british_man_is_visiting_australia/

An Australian in a British hospital

2. a Listen to Brett reading a message his wife has left him asking him to call Stella, a mutual friend coming to visit them[6]. What should Stella do?

language/ speakers
english
atlas/ regions
native phonetic inventory

Biographical Data

birth place: sydney,
australia (map)
native language: english
(eng)
other language(s): tok
pisin
age, sex: 45, male
age of english onset: 0
english learning method:
naturalistic
english residence:
australia
*length of english
residence:* 45 years

▶ 0:22 / 0:22 ● 🔊 ⬇

english84 Elicitation Paragraph:

Please call Stella. Ask her to bring these things with her from the store: Six spoons of fresh snow peas, five thick slabs of blue cheese, and maybe a snack for her brother Bob. We also need a small plastic snake and a big toy frog for the kids. She can scoop these things into three red bags, and we will go meet her Wednesday at the train station.

Key:
blue = potential areas for this generalization
red = actual areas for this generalization

Phonetic Transcription:

[pʰlɔɪz kʰɒːl� stɛlə ɐsk ə ɾə
bɹĩŋ n̠ɵɪz θĩŋːz wɪð ɜ fɹʌ̃m mə
stɔː sɪks spʉũnz əf fɹɛʃ ʃnɵʊ
pʰɔɪz fɑɪv θɪk slæbz ə blʉu
tʃʰɔɪz n̩ maɪbi ə snɛk fɚ ɚ
bɹɑðə bɒb wi ɒlᵛso neɾ ə smɔl
pʰlæstɪk snaɪk ɔ̃n ə bɪɡ˺ tʰɔɪ
fɹɑɡ˺ fə ðə kʰɪds ʃi ʔŋ skʉup˺
ðəɪz θĩŋz ĩnɾə θɹ̩ii ɹɛd˺ bæɡz
n̩ wɔɪ wɪlᵛ ɡɵʊ miɾ ɜ wĩnzdaɪ
æt˺ ðə tʃʰɹaĩn staɪʃn̩]

Generalizations about
Consonant: Vowel: Syllable Structure: Clear

2. b Complete the shopping list

---

[6] The recording was taken from http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_atlas.php. Students are not presented with the script until they are asked to find examples in activity 2.c but, for questions of clarity, we have included it here along with the transcription of the text.
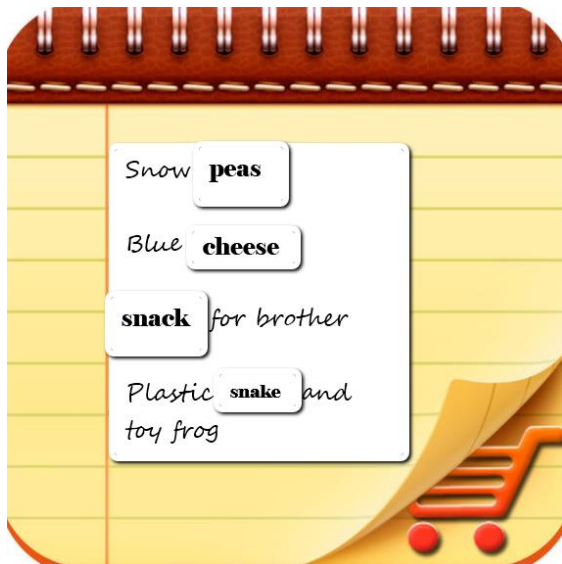
2. c Based on your answers to ex.2.b, discuss some of the differences between General British and Australian English and complete the following chart

Examples	GB	AusE
1. **peas, cheese**	Front FLEECE vowel	Diphthongized /ə/ + /i/
2. snack	**Front** TRAP vowel	Raised into /3/
3. snake	FACE vowel	**PRICE vowel**

Are there any other examples in the message? **(1. *Please, these, we*; 2.- 3. *Wednesday, train, maybe*)**

Nigerian English[7]
1. Listen to 2 extracts of a woman talking about different aspects of life in Nigeria. What does she say about English? And about shopping?

2. Read the script. What do the highlighted words have in common? **(They are all instances of weak forms)**.

> Those people that don't have enough money, we go to the market because market is more cheaper than supermarket.

Listen again. Are they pronounced the same way as in General British? **(No, schwa is not used in Nigerian English as often as in General British)**

3. Underline the words that are pronounced with dental fricative sounds in General British. **(*there, they, mother*)**

> But there are some people they don't speak English. They don't understand English. Like my own mother. She don't er … understand English. She don't speak English.

---

[7] The descriptions of Japanese English were taken from Carruthers (2006) and Kato (2011).

Listen to the recordings again. How does the speaker produce them? (**instead of the voiced dental fricative the speaker uses the voiced alveolar plosive /d/**)

4. Gut (2012) states that Nigerian English phonology has a tendency towards monophthongization. Can you find examples in both recordings that support this fact?
(/**de**ː/ = /ðeɪ/; /**do**ː**n**/ = /dəʊnt/ ; /**o**ː**n**/ = /əʊn/ ; /**do**ː**z**/ =/ ðəʊz/ ; /**go**ː/ = /gəʊ/)

Japanese English[8]
1. Watch Yoshi, a Japanese youtuber[9]. What does he think about Japanese people speaking English in comparison to other Asian speakers?

> Hello, my name is Yoshi. [...] My English is very very perfect, that is why it is called fluent English. Although statistics say, you know, that Japanese people, Englishes are very very high. It's number 1 in Asia. It's not Korea and it's not China, it's not Taiwan, it's not Thailand, it's not Singapure. It's Japan. Japan is number 1.

2. The English spoken by Japanese speakers is sometimes called *Jenglish* or *Engrish*. Why do you think this is the case? (**Japanese have difficulty distinguishing between /r/ and /l/**) Can you find any evidence of this in Yoshi's speech? (*hello, fluent, people*)

3. According to Carruthers (2006), Japanese words end in open syllables or syllabic /n/. Having this in mind, can you predict how the speaker deals with this difference? Listen to Yoshi again and check your assumptions. (**He generally adds an /o/ in words such as** *perfect, that, fluent, not* **and a final vowel sound in** *English*)

Further work can be done, which the following exemplify:
- We find phonological jokes an effective and amusing way of working with accent divergences. Görlach (1998) is a good source for the devising of new tasks.
- Online resources such as the videos shown in www.esl-languages.com/coffee-time/guess-my-accent/ allow viewers to infer what accent the speakers are using. Text-to- speech sites and apps (such as https://www.ivona.com/ and https://www.naturalreaders.com/) give users the opportunity to type in texts and then choose the variety in which they will be reproduced. Further material to work on can be found in http://www.dialectsarchive.com/dialects-accents, where a number of recordings with a description of the speakers' backgrounds have been collected. Once different varieties have been dealt with, these sites can be used for revision or for self study.

Final words
We have outlined sample activities that show a possible way of dealing with a number of varieties of English in class, focusing on the identification and analysis of the differences between these varieties and General British and guiding students to infer these differences whenever possible. We believe that the university and tertiary settings demand delving deeper into the topic.

---

[8] The descriptions of Nigerian English were taken from Gut (2012) and Ufomata (1996).
[9] Extract from a video taken from youtube, suggested by Armstrong (2012).

We also consider that they constitute the most appropriate environments for this type of work, since it is at higher education levels that we should provide future language professionals with tools that can help them to adapt to the new context of global Englishes.

References

Abercrombie, D. 1956. *Problems and Principles: Studies in Teaching of English as a Second Language*. London: Longman.

Armstrong, E. 2012. 'Japanese accent features'. Retrieved from http://www.yorku.ca/earmstro/arigato (10th May 2018)

Carruthers, S.W. 2006. 'Pronunciation Difficulties of Japanese Speakers of English: Predictions Based on a Contrastive Analysis'. Retrieved from https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Pronunciation-Difficulties-of-Japanese-Speakers-of-Carruthers/f4a75ad46653d4e43877201a24c84f8e90a40ec6 (19th February 2018)

Cox, F. 2012. *Australian English: Pronunciation and Transcription.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cruttenden, A. 2014. *Gimson's Pronunciation of English.* New York: Routledge.

Crystal, D. 2003. *English as a Global Language* 2nd Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Görlach, M. 1998. 'Linguistic jokes based on dialect divergence'. In *Even more Englishes: Studies 1996 – 1997*, 46-54. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Gut, U. 2012. 'Standards of English in West Africa'. In Hickey, Raymond (Ed.) *Standards of English: Codified Varieties Around the World*, 213- 228. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jenkins, J. 2000. *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. 1997. 'Pronunciation'. *SIG Selections 1997*: Special Interests in ELT. Ed. Alan C. McLean. Kent: IATEFL, 73-79.

Kachru, B. B. 1985. 'Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: the English language in the outer circle'. In *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*. Ed. Randolph Quirk and Henry G. Widdowson, 11-30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kato, N. 2011. 'The Common Features Among 'Japanese Englishes''. *Proceedings of the 16th Conference of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics Conference*. 8th – 10th August, 2011. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 325-328.

Levis, J. 2005. (Ed.). TESOL Quarterly Special Issue: Reconceptualizing pronunciation in TESOL: Intelligibility, World Englishes, and Identity. TESOL *Quarterly*, 39(3), 365–572.

Low, E.L. 2015. *Pronunciation for English as an International Language. From research to practice*. New York: Routledge.

Morley, J. 1991. 'The pronunciation component of teaching English to speakers of other Languages'. TESOL *Quarterly*, 25, 481–520.

Munro, M. J. and T. M. Derwing. 1995. 'Foreign Accent, Comprehensibility, and Intelligibility in the Speech of Second Language Learners'. *Language Learning* 45.1, 73-97.

Pickering, L. 2006. 'Current research on intelligibility in English as a lingua franca'. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 26(1), 219-233.

Sewell, A. 2016. *English pronunciation models in a globalized world : accent, acceptability and Hong Kong English*. New York: Routledge.

Ufomata, T. 1996. 'Setting Priorities in Teaching English Pronunciation in ESL Contexts'. Retrieved from http://pitch.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/shl9/ufoma ta/titi (10th May 2018).

Vukanovic, M. B. & I. V. Krstanovic. 2011. 'From Local to Global English (and Back). An invitation to a journey'. In Marija Brala Vukanovic, Irena Vodopija Krstanovic (Eds) 2011. *The Global*

and Local Dimensions of English: *Exploring Issues of Language and Culture*, 5- 9. Münster: LIT Verlag.