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IMPLICATIONS OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA FOR PRONUNCIATION TEACHING IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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With the majority of conversations in English these days taking place in international settings, TESOL professionals have increasingly come to realize the importance of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) communication for learners of English. Yet, it seems that the practices of English pronunciation teaching have still remained largely unaffected by these developments, with NS models prevailing in the majority of ESL/EFL teaching contexts while the implications of ELF for pronunciation often remain unconsidered. This paper suggests how pronunciation teaching in non-native speaker teacher education could be updated to equip future NNS teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions for English pronunciation teaching in a globalized world. It is argued that this can best be achieved by a combination of pronunciation training, theoretical education, and critical reflection. Furthermore, teacher education should help NNS teachers to develop a positive professional identity as English pronunciation teachers, which might be achieved by educating NNS teachers about their status as legitimate NNS pronunciation models and their potential to teach English pronunciation effectively without speaking with a ‘native-like’ accent.

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of English during the past decades has led to an immense increase of non-native learners of English around the world. The large majority of these learners use English primarily not as a second or foreign language in communication with native speakers (NSs) of the language, but as a *lingua franca* mainly with other non-native speakers (NNSs) of various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This type of English is nowadays commonly referred to as English as a lingua franca (ELF). Although ELF research is still a comparably young field, scientific interest in ELF has increased dramatically during the past decade (Jenkins, 2009, p. 143). This might be explained by a growing awareness of ELF as a phenomenon that concerns speakers of English in all three of Kachru’s ‘Circles’ (1985), i.e. NNSs in the so-called ‘Expanding Circle’ and the ‘Outer Circle’ (the former referring to countries where English has traditionally been learned as a ‘foreign’ language, the latter to countries where English is an institutionalized ‘second’ language, often having the status of an official language), but also NSs from ‘Inner Circle’ countries, where English is spoken as a first language (such as the US or the UK). Being restricted neither to a particular social context nor to a specific geographical region, ELF communication takes place all around the globe, wherever speakers of English of various different L1 backgrounds meet and communicate with each other. In 2001, Seidlhofer considered it “the most extensive contemporary use of English worldwide” (p. 133), and with the continuing increase of globalization and the consequent need for a common medium of international communication, ELF will most probably continue to expand further in the future. Obviously, this has important implications for English language teaching (ELT), as numerous learners are now

to be prepared for ELF communication rather than for ‘foreign language’ communication with NSs of English.

Pronunciation and ELF

If learners of English are to be prepared adequately for ELF interactions, particular attention is to be accorded to pronunciation teaching. Empirical research by Jenkins (2000) found that pronunciation was the area of language most crucial to successful ELF communication: over two thirds (27 out of 40) of communication breakdowns in Jenkins’ data were due to pronunciation errors. Research by Deterding (2013) on South-East Asian ELF confirmed this tendency, with 86 % of misunderstandings in his data involving pronunciation errors.

Based on her findings, Jenkins (2000) devised a pedagogical ‘core’ of sounds essential to intelligibility in ELF. This ‘Lingua Franca Core’ (LFC) includes (cf. Jenkins, 2000, p. 159):

- all consonant sounds, except for /θ/, /ð/ and [ʃ]
- vowel length contrasts (including those caused by a following lenis or fortis consonant)
- aspiration of /p/, /t/, and /k/
- the long central vowel /ɜ:/
- maintaining initial consonant clusters (word-medial or final consonant clusters may only be simplified according to L1 rules of elision)
- rhoticity and avoidance of [r] for /r/ in intervocalic position
- nuclear stress placement and chunking

As can be seen from the above list, it is the segmental rather than the suprasegmental level that was found to be crucial to intelligibility in ELF communication. Indeed, virtually all instances of communication breakdown in Jenkins’ data involving pronunciation were caused by negative L1 transfer on the segmental level (Jenkins, 2000, pp. 87-88). Jenkins attributes the importance of the segmental level for intelligibility in ELF to the fact that NNSs tend to rely on bottom-up rather than top-down processing strategies, “which, in turn, lead them to focus too firmly on the acoustic signal” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 20).

It should be noted that the above list is not to be regarded as definite, and the need for further empirical research to confirm and ‘fine-tune’ the LFC has been emphasized by Jenkins herself (2000, p. 235). A number of studies have already been conducted for this purpose: for example, the findings of Deterding (2013), Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006), Osimk (2009), and Rajadurai (2006) all confirmed that /θ/ and /ð/ are not essential for intelligibility in ELF communication. The importance of aspiration of /p/, /t/, /k/ was confirmed by Osimk’s and Rajadurai’s research, but could not be justified on the basis of Deterding’s (2013) data. In this sense, the LFC is to be understood as an “ongoing empirical description of how non-native speakers achieve mutual intelligibility” (Walker, 2010, p. 44).

Another important aspect of Jenkins’ proposal for pronunciation teaching is her call for the teaching of phonological accommodation skills, which, according to her data, are essential for successful ELF communication. However, despite their communicative value, such phonological

adjustments are only rarely used by ELF speakers (Jenkins, 2000, p. 180-181). Jenkins therefore stresses the need to teach both productive and receptive phonological accommodation skills to learners who wish to engage in international communication (Jenkins, 2000, p. 210, 2005, p. 150; see Walker, 2010, for practical teaching suggestions). However, it seems that this aspect of Jenkins' proposal is frequently overlooked, in particular by those who mistake the LFC for a strict and invariable pronunciation norm to which learners should conform regardless of the particular situational context in which they find themselves and the type of interlocutors with whom they are communicating. It should be noted that this idea of the LFC would go against the very concept of ELF itself, as linguistic norms in ELF are not determined by external (NS or NNS) norms, but negotiated by the interlocutors themselves, being "established during the interaction within the current possibilities"¹⁰ (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 18). Jenkins herself affirmed from the beginning that she did not intend the LFC to be taken as a model for imitation, but as a pedagogical core approach that allows for variety in L2 pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000, p. 131; see also Jenkins, 2005, p. 147 & p. 151, 2006, p. 36). After all, one of the most important intentions behind Jenkins' LFC was to give NNSs "the same sociolinguistic rights as those enjoyed by L1 speakers" (Jenkins, 2005, p. 147) by allowing them to express their L1 identity via their accent. This is possible via the 'non-core features' (i.e. those pronunciation features not included in the LFC, such as vowel quality or the th-sounds), which are intended to remain open to a speaker's personal preference.

Implications for English Language Teaching

The rise of ELF has serious implications for the teaching and learning of English in general and English pronunciation in particular. Within traditional approaches to English language teaching, it has been assumed that NNS learners of English are to be prepared for communication with NSs. Yet, such a perspective seems limited in the light of the fact that most NNS learners nowadays primarily communicate with other NNSs of English. In other words, the question arises why English pronunciation teaching should persist in exclusively orienting its goals and models towards NS usage when numerous NNSs successfully communicate with each other every day without adhering to NS pronunciation norms. This is not to say that NS norms have lost their validity for ELT altogether, for there will always be learners of English whose primary interest lies in communicating with NSs and for whom a NS accent will hence constitute the most appropriate pronunciation model. Rather, it means that for learners who are more likely to use English as a *lingua franca* to interact (mostly) with other NNSs rather than as a foreign language (and this will be the vast majority of NNS learners of English), a different approach to teaching English pronunciation might have to be considered, namely one that privileges (or at least gives equal importance to) the implications of ELF for users of English instead of focusing solely on the teaching of the linguistic norms of ENL varieties. For this to happen, ELF and its implications for ELT will have to form part of teacher education and teacher training programs, so that future teachers of English will be able to make informed decisions as to the teaching

¹⁰ This means that rather than strictly conforming to NS usage, successful ELF speakers settle on 'ad hoc' norms that are operable for all participants involved and that depend on the common linguistic resources available to them (see further Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 18). On the level of pronunciation, this kind of negotiation of linguistic norms can best be described as the aforementioned 'phonological accommodation', which involves productive phonological accommodation (the readiness and ability to adjust one's pronunciation to the perceptive needs of one's interlocutor) and receptive phonological accommodation (the readiness and ability to accommodate receptively to the idiosyncrasies of one's interlocutor's pronunciation).

goals and pronunciation models appropriate in a specific teaching context (Jenkins, 1998b, 2000). Yet, in numerous teacher education programs aimed at NNSs of English, there has been a strong focus on pronunciation training rather than teacher education, with socio-psychological and socio-linguistic considerations only assuming a marginal role or being neglected altogether. At the Vienna English Department, for example, teaching degree students receive extensive phonetic training in either Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA), with the course aim being a pronunciation approximating the chosen model accent as closely as possible. The general applicability of both RP and GA as models in all teaching contexts remains unquestioned throughout the course, and alternative approaches to English pronunciation teaching or the downsides of the so-called ‘nativeness principle’ (Levis, 2005) remain unconsidered (cf. Thir, 2014). Such normative approaches to English pronunciation teaching do not only seem outmoded in the light of the unprecedented sociolinguistic developments that have taken place in the English speaking world in the past decades, but potentially detrimental to the development of NNS teachers’ professional identity, who, unless they manage to attain a native-like accent in English (an ambitious goal achieved by few), often seem to feel concerned about their own pronunciation skills (Medgyes, 1994; Tang, 1997; Kamhi-Stein, Aagard, Ching, Paik, & Sasser, 2004), hence doubting their competence to teach English pronunciation effectively (. Yet, the active involvement of NNS teachers in English pronunciation teaching is crucial for the success of the ELT enterprise, as the majority of foreign learners of English are taught by NNSs of English (Miller, 2009, p. 176; Moussu & Llurda, 2008, p. 315), and these learners will not receive the necessary instruction to develop the pronunciation skills needed in a globalized world (and/or in a particular geographical context) if their teachers lack the competence and/or confidence to make pronunciation part of their teaching. The need for an overhaul of pronunciation teaching in NNS teacher education is thus evident not only from a sociolinguistic, but also from a professional and a psychological point of view.

Research questions

How can pronunciation teaching in NNS teacher education be up-dated in order to

- a) equip NNS teachers with the linguistic and pedagogic knowledge and skills necessary to teach English pronunciation effectively and to make informed decisions in their teaching?
- b) help them develop a positive professional identity as English pronunciation teachers?

UPDATING PRONUNCIATION TEACHING FOR NNS TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

In order for NNS teachers of English to develop professional competence in the area of English pronunciation teaching as suggested in point a) and to maintain a positive self-image as pronunciation teachers (as suggested in point b), pronunciation teaching in NNS teacher education must include the following three components (see also Figure 1).

- 1) Pronunciation training
- 2) Education
- 3) Critical reflection

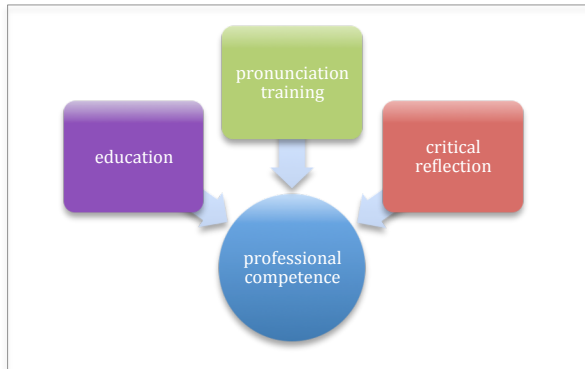


Figure 1. Suggested structure for pronunciation teaching in NNS teacher education

Pronunciation Training

In order to constitute a good phonetic role model for their future students, teachers should speak with an accent that is intelligible to a large number of interlocutors, which makes pronunciation training an indispensable component of NNS teacher education.¹¹ As the LFC constitutes a good basis for international intelligibility while still giving NNS teachers the opportunity to express their L1 identity via their accent, I suggest that the acquisition of the LFC components (including phonological accommodation skills) be made a necessary minimum requirement for *all* NNS teachers of English. This is of course not to say that student teachers who wish to go beyond the LFC and perhaps even aim for a native-like accent in English should not be allowed to do so (see also Jenkins, 2000, p. 161, 2002, p. 101). Pronunciation teaching will always have to take into account specific learner preferences and needs, be they individual or determined by local circumstances. Fortunately, nothing in the LFC is ‘unnecessary’ for learners whose goal is to acquire a NS accent (Walker, 2008, p. 9), which makes it an appropriate preliminary goal even for those who might later decide to add other pronunciation features to their accent repertoire (or who are entirely sure about wanting to acquire a NS accent right from the beginning). As Walker (2010) remarks, the LFC constitutes “an excellent foundation for learners wherever they are, and whatever their long-term pronunciation goals” (p. 46).

Education

As stated above, if English teachers are to make informed choices as to the goals and pronunciation models of their own teaching, they must be educated about the socio-psychological and sociolinguistic aspects of English pronunciation teaching (Jenkins, 1998b, p. 125). In the following, I present a number of issues that future teachers of English should be aware of and which should thus be addressed in both NS and NNS teacher education (for a more extensive list and discussion, see Thir, 2014; note that some of these points are also mentioned in Jenkins, 1998a).

¹¹ It should be noted that if NS teachers wish to act as a pronunciation model for their students, they, too, will need to speak with an accent that can be considered intelligible in a large number of contexts, and might thus have to adjust their pronunciation in some respects for the purpose of pronunciation teaching.

Phonological variation as the rule rather than the exception. Future teachers should be aware that both L1 and L2 variation in pronunciation are entirely natural phenomena, which cannot and should not be eliminated. Instead of pursuing the unrealistic (and unethical) goal of getting each and every learner to give up his/her mother tongue accent, teachers should be encouraged to take a more positive view on phonological L2 variation. That is, student teachers should understand that speaking with a foreign accent is acceptable as long as a satisfactory degree of intelligibility is maintained.

Pronunciation & identity. Future teachers must be aware that our pronunciation is “an expression of who we are or aspire to be, of how we want to be seen by others, of the social communities with which we identify or seek membership, and of whom we admire or ostracise” (Setter & Jenkins, 2005, p. 5). Given this close relationship between pronunciation and personal and social identity, individual learner preferences in L2 pronunciation learning (such as the wish to retain some features of one’s L1 accent in English) should be respected. Student teachers should understand that learners have a right to express their L1 identity via their pronunciation, as do NNS teachers.

The reality of international communication. Student teachers should be introduced to the concept of ELF and be made aware of its relevance to speakers of English in a globalized world. They must also be educated about the implications of ELF for English pronunciation teaching, i.e., the LFC and the importance of helping learners develop phonological accommodation skills. In addition, teachers should be reminded that NS norms have no direct relevance for ELF communication, and that a ‘native-like’ accent does not guarantee communicative success in ELF (as some features of NS accents might even be counterproductive to intelligibility in ELF – see Jenkins, 2000, p. 146-149; Walker, 2010, p. 41-43).

Models in English pronunciation teaching. Many teachers seem to mistake accents such as RP or GA for invariable norms that learners are to imitate regardless of the specific context of language use. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) contrast this notion of ‘norm’ with the one of ‘model’, i.e. a point of reference used to guide the learning process, which is “connected to language in use and therefore variable” (p. 2.7). In order to be able to use accents such as RP or GA as reference models rather than as norms, student teachers should be introduced to the distinction between model and norm according to Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994). They should be reminded that “a reference model is not ‘the truth’ or ‘the right way’ but a reference point around which many flavourings are possible” (Cauldwell, 2014).

Accentedness vs. intelligibility. Intelligibility is a complex and a relative matter, depending upon a number of different factors such as the nature of the interlocutors involved, familiarity with the accent in question, or prejudices and attitudes on the part of the listener (Rajadurai, 2007, p. 95). Future teachers should be aware of the complex nature of intelligibility, that unintelligibility does not equal accentedness (Rajadurai, 2007, p. 92), and that intelligibility is an interactive process that lies within the responsibility of both the listener and the speaker (Rajadurai, 2007, p. 90-91; Smith & Nelson, 1985, p. 333).

The role of the teacher’s accent in pronunciation teaching. As stated earlier, many NNS teachers seem to feel insecure about pronunciation teaching due to their own L1 accent in English. That is, they fail to see – and thus must be made aware – that

- 1) in a multimedia age where audio-materials of various kinds are readily available via e.g. the World Wide Web, pronunciation teaching is not solely dependent on the teacher's accent alone.
- 2) it is simply not true that only teachers with a 'native-like' accent can be good pronunciation models for their learners. In fact, Medgyes (1994) argues that NNS teachers can constitute excellent 'learner models', because they are a shining example of successful L2 learners of English. A similar point is also made by Murphy (2014, p. 259) and Jenkins (2000, p. 226), who argue that fluent NNS speakers constitute the optimum pronunciation models for international communication both in a sociolinguistic and socio-psychological sense (i.e., in terms of attainability).

A further point to which the attention of both NS and NNS teachers should be drawn is that a teacher's accent is not the only model to which learners should be exposed in the course of pronunciation teaching. Exposing learners to different teaching models is important in order to cater for the individual preferences of different types of learners, some of whom might prefer NS models for pronunciation learning while others might more strongly identify with NNS models (Murphy, 2014, p. 266). Another reason why exposing learners to different types of accents (both native and non-native) is important is the need to expand their receptive accent repertoires in order to increase their tolerance of phonological variation, and, thereby, their receptive phonological accommodation skills (Jenkins, 1998b, p. 125, 2000, p. 184, 2002, p. 100, 2005, p. 150).

Critical Reflection

Future teachers need to be encouraged to reflect critically on both traditional and novel approaches to pronunciation teaching. Thus, questions such as the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches as well as their appropriateness within different teaching contexts and for different types of learners should be considered in (NNS and NS) teacher education. In addition, NNS teachers should receive opportunities to reflect on their personal goals for English pronunciation learning: is it important for them to preserve some features of their L1 accent in English, or do they wish to become as native-like as possible? To what extent do professional or sociolinguistic considerations or dominant beliefs about the status of NNS accents in pronunciation teaching affect their personal goals? What accent would they feel most 'comfortable' with, regardless of these considerations and beliefs?

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I presented a number of suggestions how pronunciation teaching in NNS teacher education could be updated in order to equip NNS teachers with the skills needed to make informed decisions in English pronunciation teaching, especially as regards the preparation of learners for ELF interactions. This could be achieved by providing future teachers with an adequate education about the most important socio-linguistic and socio-psychosocial issues in the acquisition of English pronunciation as well as the implications of ELF for English pronunciation teaching, and by encouraging them to reflect critically on traditional and novel approaches to pronunciation teaching. A further aim of this paper was to suggest how teacher education could help NNS teachers to perceive of themselves as proficient pronunciation

teachers rather than as ‘failed native speakers’ who are incapable of teaching English pronunciation effectively. Again, education and critical reflection seem to be the key here. As regards NNS teachers’ own pronunciation skills, it was suggested that NNS teachers should, as a minimum requirement, receive pronunciation training to the extent that they attain intelligibility in international communication. However, individual preferences of NNS teachers should be respected, as all teachers should speak with an accent that they feel comfortable with. That is, as long as the criterion of intelligibility is fulfilled, it should be up to the respective teacher to decide what kind of pronunciation suits them best.

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