

Non-native Pronunciation of English

Teaching the Pronunciation of English

- vocabulary and grammatical structures can be ordered and taught in sequence
- x pronunciation does not permit such progressive treatment, all phonetic/phonological features potentially present from the very first lesson
- performance targets:
 - (a) minimum general intelligibility = the lowest requirement, with a set of distinctive elements roughly corresponding to the phonemic inventory of RP
 - (b) high acceptability = the highest requirement, may not be identified as non-native by the native listener
- choice of a single pronunciation model
- a representative form of Br. or Am. pronunciation preferable: widely understood, adequately described in textbooks
- no conscious attempts to alter the pronunciation accord. to the situation as native speakers
- importance of internal consistency, no mixture of different pronunciation styles
- focus on those features of E not found in the learner's native language

Segmental Aspects

- focus on those sounds with high frequency of occurrence (vowels 40%, consonants 60% of the phonemes uttered)
- acquisition of the full phoneme system: 20 vowels (12 monophthongs, 8 diphthongs), 24 consonants

Vowels

- complex vowel system
- the existence of a central long vowel /ɜ:/
- distinction of voiced /ɜ/ x voiceless /ə/
- RP: no r-colouring of the vowels /ɜ/ and /ə/ in words spelled with vowel letter + <r>
- the extremely open quality of /ɒ/, help: relating /ɒ/ to /ɑ:/
- the quality of /æ/, help: a conscious constriction of the pharynx
- the opposition of the close vowels /i:/ x /ɪ/ and /u:/ x /ʊ/
- the delicately differentiated front vowel set /i/ - /ɪ/ - /e/ - /æ/ - /ʌ/
- durational variations: esp. in oppositions 'seed x seat; heard x hurt; road x wrote'
- quality & quantity complexes:
 - long tense /i:/ in 'bead' x reduced tense [ɪ] in 'beat' x short lax /ɪ/ in 'bit'
 - the reduced tense [ɪ] before voiceless consonants ('seat') NOT to be confused with short lax /ɪ/ ('sit')
 - qualitative and quantitative relationship btw /ɪ/ x /i:/ ('bid x bead')
 - long tense /u:/ in 'food' x reduced tense [ʊ] in 'boot' x short lax /ʊ/ in 'good'
 - qualitative and quantitative relationship btw /æ/ x /ʌ/ x /ɑ:/ ('match x much x march')

Consonants

Plosives

- shares with many languages the system of plosives /p, t, k, b, d, g/ x but: not the conventions of its realisation
- E: presence/absence of aspiration as the crucial feature x CZ: presence/absence of voicing
- aspiration of voiceless /p, t, k/ in accented positions x no aspiration of voiced /b, d, g/
- avoidance of intervening [h] with voiceless plosives, avoidance of obscure vowel of the [ə] type with voiced plosives
- devoicing of /l, r, j, w/ after accented /p, t, k/ ('plead' [l̥] x 'bleed' [l], 'pray' [ɹ] x 'bray' [ɹ])
- /t, d/ before the homorganic syllabics /n/ or /l/ with nasal or lateral release
- avoidance of aspiration or of intrusive obscure vowel before nasal or lateral release ('little' *[t̪ɪt̪l̪], 'middle' *[mɪd̪l̪], 'button, sudden')

Fricatives

- distinction btw the labiodental fricative /v/ x the labial-velar approximant /w/: /v/ with strong friction btw the

lower lip and upper teeth x /w/ with protruded and rounded lip action and no lower teeth contact ('vain x wane; verse x worse; vest x west')

- avoidance of replacement of the dental fricative /θ/ by the dental stop /t/ or the alveolar fricative /s/ and of the dental fricative /ð/ by the dental stop /d/ or the alveolar fricative /z/
- distinction btw words with initial <h> + vowel x initial vowel; elision of /h/ in unaccented non-initial positions in connected speech with function words

Affricates

- avoidance of replacement of the palato-alveolar affricates /tʃ, dʒ/ by the sequences of /s, z/ + /j/

Nasals

- avoidance of /g/ after /ŋ/, esp. before vowels ('singing, reading out, a long essay')

Approximants

/l/

- the qualities and distribution of the allophones [l, ɫ, ɭ]
- avoidance of phonemic opposition btw [l] x [ɫ], avoidance of over-verbalisation in pre-vocalic positions (Slav languages)
- devoicing of [ɭ] after aspirated /p, t, k/ ('plot' with a fully voiced /l/ risks confusion with 'blot')

/r/

- use of the post-alveolar approximant or frictionless continuant [ɹ]
- avoidance of uvular trill [R], uvular fricative [ʁ], lingual trill [r] or tap [ɾ] (though the least objectionable substitute)
- help: approaching the RP [ɹ] as if a vowel
- avoidance of the intrusive post-vocalic /r/ in words spelled with vowel letter + <r>
- help: considering the post-vocalic *r* simply as a mark of length for the preceding vowel ('car, arm, hurt') or as a sign of the 2nd element [ə] of the diphthong ('fear, there, tour')
- use of the linking /r/ in connected speech = the word-final *r* links to a following word beginning with a vowel ('far away, pour out')
- devoicing of [ɹ] after /p, t, k/: distinction btw the sequences [pr-, tr-, kr-] x [br-, dr-, gr-] ('pray x bray; try x dry; crow x grow')

Consonant Clusters

- permits many consonant clusters x but: permits different combinations than CZ
- the first plosive of stop sequences with no audible release ('actor, rugby, big dog')
- no intrusive vowel inserted in consonant clusters, esp. between /s/ and /p, t, k/ ('sport, strike, school')

Prosodic Aspects

Rhythm and Accent

- an English listener tends to interpret a distorted sound/accidental pattern in terms of his own correct pattern, aided by the meaning of the total context
- x but: a word pronounced with the correct sound sequence may be misunderstood when pronounced with an incorrect relative prominence of the syllables
- rhythm + the related obscuration of weak syllables = the prime distinguishing feature of E
- unaccented syllables outnumber those with primary or secondary accents
- focus on variations in the accidental patterns of citation forms x forms in connected speech
- **reduction** of unaccented vowels, incl. weak forms of function words in normal speech (strong forms only under special emphasis, contrast or in final positions)
- elision of weak vowels in established cases
- **elision** of alveolar consonants: the simplification of three-consonant clusters by the elision of the medial stops /t/ or /d/ ('restless, kindness, wind down')
- consonant clusters with no epenthetic vowels ('sport' */sə'pɔt/ [= homonymous with 'support'], */ə'spɔt/ [= homonymous with 'a sport'])
- focus on the variation of quality in words distinguished by a **shift of accent**

- cases of the accentual pattern of an extended word not associated with the accentual pattern of the root ('photograph' /'fəʊtəgrɑ:f/ x 'photography' /fə'tɒgrəfi/, 'nation' /'neɪʃn/ x 'national' /'næʃnəl/, 'origin' /'ɒrɪdʒɪn/ x 'original' /ə'rɪdʒɪnəl/)
- primary accent on the final syllable of the root before the suffixes <-ity, -ion, -ian, -ic, -ify, -ible, -able, -ish> ('uni'versity, ma'gician, dra'matic')
- accent on the penultimate syllable of the root in 3+ syllable verbs with <-ate> ('penetrate') x but: accent on <-ate> in disyllables ('cre'ate')
- accent on the 1st syllable of the suffix <-ation> ('nationali'zation, pressuri'zation, privati'zation')

Intonation

- variation in intonation btw languages not as great as variation in segments
- x but: sufficient to cause a strong foreign accent and possible misunderstanding
- intonation = the crucial factor for the accentual patterning of E
- shares with most non-tone languages the tendency of falling tunes for declaratives and commands and rising tunes for questions and non-finality
- x some types and uses of fall and rise (incl. fall-rise) specific to E
- focus on attitudinal implications of intonation
- dividing the speech into **intonational phrases** (in ways very similar in any language)
- putting the nucleus on the focal point in the sentence, de-accenting old information at the end of a phrase
- using appropriate **nuclear tones**: over-use of simple falling tone > aggressive; over-use of simple rising tones > tentative