

Reading 01: Pronunciation Fundamentals

Chapter 1

Key concepts



Real Cases

- Cushing (1995) 'Flight Safety Digest' report

to ~ two
(Aircraft descending)

ATC: to descend “**two** four zero zero”

Pilot: to descend **to** “four zero zero”

to ~ two
(Runaway for landing)

Co-pilot: “Cleared **two** seven (27L)”

Pilot (understood as): Cleared **to** “seven (7L)”

Asylum Seekers

- Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin (LADO) process

Validity

Based on pronunciation of certain words

Fraser (2009)'s criticism: "sometimes of shockingly low quality"

Introduction

- **Importance of pronunciation?**

- Speech intelligibility:

Listeners can understand the speaker's intended message

Communication

- No understanding or **misunderstanding**

Introduction

- **Importance of pronunciation?**
- Speech patterns affect everyday life (particularly for speakers of a second language (L2))
- Accents: **SHIBBOLETH** nature of foreign-accented utterances

The phrase "**SHIBBOLETH nature of foreign-accented utterances**" refers to the way in which the pronunciation of certain words can reveal a person's regional or cultural background. The term "shibboleth" is often used to describe a word or custom that is used to distinguish members of one group from another. In the context of language, a shibboleth can be a particular pronunciation or intonation pattern that is characteristic of a certain group of speakers.

When applied to foreign-accented utterances, the phrase suggests that the way in which a person pronounces certain words can reveal their native language or regional accent. For example, the pronunciation of the "r" sound in English can vary widely depending on a person's native language or regional accent, and can be used as a shibboleth to identify a person's background.

Introduction

- **Importance of pronunciation?**
- Speech patterns affect everyday life (particularly for speakers of a second language (L2))
- Accents: **SHIBBOLETH** nature of foreign-accented utterances
- **Foreigner talk** (Ferguson, 1975): fostering communication (could be an advantage of L2?)

High-prestige dialect

vs.

Low-prestige dialect

High-prestige dialect

vs.

Low-prestige dialect

Concepts needed for understanding
the **whys and hows** of assisting L2
speakers to develop more effective
oral production skills

Essential terminology

- **Pronunciation?**

The ways in which speakers use their articulatory apparatus to create speech.

➡ All the **individual speech sounds** in a particular language as well as the **prosodic** and **voice quality** features that are shared by speakers of that language.

➡ **Segmentals** and prosody (or **suprasegmentals**)

Segmentals

Suprasegmentals

You did it
Did you do it
What did you do it

Segmentals

Suprasegmentals

You did it
Did you do it
What did you do it

Individual sounds:
Consonants and vowels

word stress, sentence
stress, rhythm, intonation,
juncture, tone

ACCENT

Segmentals

Suprasegmentals

Vocabulary

Grammar

You did it

Did you do it

What did you do it

Individual sounds:
Consonants and vowels

word stress, sentence
stress, rhythm, intonation,
juncture, tone

Efforts to understand what the
speaker is saying?

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COMPREHENSIBILITY
(Both L1 & L2)

Intelligibility

The degree to which that message is received as intended by an attentive listener.

Comprehensibility

The ease or difficulty a listener experiences in understanding an utterance.

Fluency

(Proficiency?)

The rate and the degree of fluidity of speech (as signaled by the presence or absence of hesitation markers, self-repetitions, and filled and unfilled pauses).

- Fillmore (1979) “simply the ability to talk at length with few pauses.” (L1 fluency)
- Derwing et al. (2009) Correlation between L1 & L2 fluency
- Nation (1989) Fluency can be enhanced in the classroom.

~ cognitive fluency

Table 1.1. Some basic pronunciation terminology

Term	Definition	Synonyms
pronunciation	All aspects of the oral production of language, including segments, prosody, voice quality, and rate	
segments	The individual vowels and consonants in the phonological inventory of a given language	speech sounds, phones
prosody	The aspects of speech that carry across an utterance: stress, intonation, rhythm	suprasegmentals
accent	A particular pattern of pronunciation that is perceived to distinguish members of different speech communities	different speech patterns, salient speech differences
comprehensibility	The ease or difficulty a listener experiences in understanding an utterance	effort, processing difficulty
intelligibility	The degree of match between a speaker's intended message and the listener's comprehension	actual understanding, comprehension
fluency	The degree to which speech flows easily without pauses and other dysfluency markers	fluidity

- **Accent & intelligibility: Partial independence.**

=> These are not the same.

➡ Accented but fully intelligible speech is often observed. (Munro & Derwing, 1995a)

- **Intelligibility & Comprehensibility: More closely related**

=> These are not the same.

➡ Difficult to understand but fully understandable speech

- **Accent & fluency: only weakly correlated**

=> These are somewhat independent.

➡ Accented but fluent with high intelligibility and comprehensibility

Table 1.2. Results of possible intelligibility and comprehensibility combinations

Intelligibility	Comprehensibility	Result
High	High	Utterance is fully understood; little effort required
High	Low	Utterance is fully understood; great effort is required
Low	Low	Utterance is not (fully) understood; great effort is exerted
Low	High	Probably rare. Utterance is not fully understood; however, the listener has the false impression of having easily determined the speaker's intended meaning

Table 1.3. Results of possible intelligibility and accentedness combinations

Intelligibility	Accentedness	Result
High	High	Utterance is fully understood; accent is very strong
High	Low	Utterance is fully understood; accent is barely noticeable
Low	Low	Not relevant to pronunciation; however, an utterance could be unintelligible because of problems with grammar or word choices, or non-linguistic factors such as noise
Low	High	Utterance is not (fully) understood; accent is very strong

Nativeness and Intelligibility Principles

- **Levis (2005)'s two basic orientations to pronunciation instruction**

Nativeness

➡ Goal: to develop L2 speech that is indistinguishable from that of a native speaker.

Accuracy was emphasized in the Audiolingual Era
(in the mid-20th century)
e.g., Accurate pronunciation through audio recordings

Intelligibility

➡ Goal: to develop intelligible L2 speech irrespective of how native-like it sounds.

Sweet (1900), Abercrombie (1949), Gimson (1970)

- **Empirical evidence:**

- ➡ Few adult learners ever achieve native-like pronunciation in the L2 (Flege et al. 1995)
- ➡ Intelligibility and accentedness are partially independent (Munro & Derwing, 1995a)

An evidence-based approach to pronunciation teaching and teaching materials

- Despite the existence of some textbooks, most instructors had limited access to sophisticated materials and little or no direction on how they should proceed, apart from drills and minimal pair practice.

Knowledge source:

Phonetics

Pronunciation

- ➡ Although some speech researchers were actively working on L2 pronunciation, most research studies were of limited value to practitioners.
- ➡ Teachers were thus left, for the most part, to rely on their own intuitions and their observations of their students' linguistic behavior.
- ➡ Instructors felt inadequately prepared to deal with pronunciation and therefore avoided teaching it.

- More recently, applied linguistics researchers have turned their attention to L2 pronunciation, using an expanded range of techniques to obtain information that is potentially helpful in contemporary L2 classrooms.
 - When focusing on intelligibility: both speakers and listeners are in consideration.
- ➡ Any assessment of intelligibility must make reference to listeners' perceptions as well as L2 speakers' productions.)

e.g., Using T/F sentences for intelligibility assessment (Munro & Derwing, 1995b)

e.g., Using recorded picture narratives or mini-lectures from L2 for listeners' comprehension assessment.

=> Finding ways to help teachers to distinguish aspects of accent that are detrimental to intelligibility from those that do not cause communication problems for listeners.

- Materials developers: providing instructors with useful guidelines about what is reasonable to teach.
- ➡ Levis (1999): several of the intonation patterns covered in textbooks directed at L2 students are not easily distinguished by native speakers. (not appropriate)
- ➡ Catford (1987): some minimal pair contrasts are considerably more important than others.
- ➡ Levis & Cortes (2008) noted that the members of some pairs occur far less frequently than their counterparts. (e.g., thigh / thy)
- ➡ It helps to decide what is more worthy of class time.

Setting the record straight

[1] “Perceived foreign accent” and other type of foreign accent? (X): Accent is, by definition, something that is noticed by listeners; therefore, there is no kind of accent other than a perceived accent.

[2] The view that speech evaluation carried out without participation of listeners. (e.g., acoustic measures; subjective vs. objective assessment)

=> It may be unhelpful in understanding the nature of speech assessment. (accent and intelligibility always involve listeners.)

[3] Misinterpretation of some of research findings.

e.g., segmental vs. suprasegmental instruction (Derwing et al, 1998; Derwing & Rossiter, 2003): they found that suprasegmental group showed meaningful improvement. However, this doesn't mean that other instructions are unhelpful or shouldn't be used in the classroom.

[4] What should be taught? Whether there are some aspects of L2 pronunciation that are off limit?

=> (Authors response) Intelligibility and comprehensibility should be priorities, but it is important that teachers be flexible in accommodating students' needs and wishes, keeping in mind the time available.