

## ELF PRONUNCIATION

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### Goals for pronunciation

Learners need clear goals. Achieving goals generates a sense of progress, and this improves motivation. Goals in pronunciation have always been based on native speaker accents, such as the UK accent, traditionally Received Pronunciation (RP), or the US accent, General American (GA). The reasons for choosing a native-speaker accent are so obvious as to be beyond question. Or are they?

The last two decades have seen English go truly global. And in today's globalized world, the vast majority of spoken communication in English takes place between non-native speakers who are using English as a *lingua franca* (ELF). This new role for English has implications for various aspects of classroom practice. This is especially true of pronunciation, since we know that ELF users communicate successfully in accents that differ significantly from either RP or GA, or indeed from any native-speaker accent. In fact, each ELF user speaks with his or her own accent, the nature of which largely depends upon the pronunciation of their first language.

### Pronunciation for ELF

So how is communication possible if each person brings a different accent to the conversation, and none of these is a native-speaker accent? In other words, what do such accents have in common? Some time ago, questions like these prompted Jennifer Jenkins to research spoken exchanges between non-native speakers. The outcome of her work has left us with guidelines as to which pronunciation features are necessary if English is to operate as a *lingua franca*, and if speakers' diverse accents are to be internationally intelligible.

Collectively, these guidelines are known as the *lingua franca core* (LFC), and can be summarised in four areas:

#### 1. Consonant sounds

ELF users need to be able to produce all of the English consonants, except for /θ/ and /ð/ (the voiceless and voiced 'th' sounds in 'think' and 'then' respectively). The LFC also requires speakers to correctly aspirate /p/, /t/ and /k/ at the beginning of a stressed syllable, such as 'pin', 'ten' and 'kind', or 'depend', 'attend' or 'became'.

## **2. Consonant cluster simplification**

The deletion of a consonant from a cluster at the beginning of a word seriously compromises ELF intelligibility. Deleting the /s/ from 'Spain', for example, would produce 'pain'. A strategy of adding an extra vowel would produce 'eSpain' or 'Sipain', both of which are intelligible in ELF contexts. Addition, then is preferable to deletion.

## **3. Vowel length**

ELF intelligibility requires speakers to produce the differences in length of English vowels. This is not just in terms of the 'long' and 'short' vowels of the language. Speakers also need to learn to shorten all vowels when they are followed by a voiceless consonant. The difference between 'ice' and 'eyes', for example, depends not only on /s/ versus /z/, but also on the longer vowel in 'eyes'.

## **4. Sentence stress**

We speak in small blocks of words, or *thought groups*. In each thought group, one word is made especially prominent, and listeners pay special attention to this focus word. Choosing the correct word for prominence is very important for ELF intelligibility.

### **ELF pronunciation and me**

'Are these goals appropriate to my own teaching situation?' For many teachers around the world, the answer to this question is undoubtedly 'yes'. The LFC is a complete, basic programme for communication in ELF contexts, and mastery of the four areas described above means being intelligible to over 1,000 million fellow non-native speakers of English. Competence in native-speaker accents such as RP or GA, on the other hand, does not guarantee such international intelligibility. Various studies have shown that for non-native listeners, native speakers are not necessarily as easy to understand as competent non-native speakers.