Cityscapes:
Islands of the Self

Language Studies

Proceedings of the 22nd AIA Conference. Cagliari 15-17 September 2005

Volume 2

edited by
Laura Jottini
Gabriella Del Lungo
John Douthwaite

Contents

CRISTIANO BROCCIAS

THE CLASSIFICATION OF ENGLISH ACCENT BY ADVANCED L2 STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

1. Introduction

Cityscapes are encompassing an ever increasing number of globalisation features, which may result in the progressive reduction in geographical and cultural differences (e.g. blocks of flats, supermarkets and fast-food outlets which are indistinguishable from country to country). This also applies to language since e.g. differences among accents in England are known to have been disappearing over the last century because of increased social and geographical mobility (e.g. migration to the major English cities), see Bosisio (this volume). Further, flattening of the linguistic landscape also involves the teaching of English as a Lingua Franca (see Jenkins 2000, 2003, 2004 on this notion). The proponents of this supra-national model argue in favour of a hybrid, simplified model for English supposedly reflecting an existent core model for English which is valid the world over. This entails, among other things, a reduced interest in developing foreign learners' awareness of native English accents since the primary goal of the pronunciation model behind the notion of English as a Lingua Franca is to allow for intelligibility among non-native speakers (by reducing the English phonological inventory to a minimum).

It is therefore of great interest and importance to explore in more depth the current relation between non-native speakers' perception of different native pronunciation models and the development of English as a Lingua Franca. In order to do this, this paper first investigates how successful advanced L2 students of English are when asked to classify English accents and then tries to relate the experimental findings to the current debate on the teaching of English pronunciation (and, more generally, English language). In particular, I try to show that if the lack of pronunciation awareness revealed by the present experiment can be taken as symptomatic of a larger scale tendency, then opting for approaches like Jenkins' core approach may worsen the current situation. I contend that Jenkins' core approach is based on too narrow a view of language, which, among other things, largely ignores the emotive and phatic dimensions in favour of an instrumental view of language, and that Jenkins' model can be seen as a by-product of a general trend towards cultural globalisation.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the experiment and sums up the results, which are discussed in section 3. Section 4 ties in the experimental findings with the current debate on the teaching of English pronunciation. In particular, it focuses on and critically discusses Jenkins' core approach. Finally, section 5 draws the main conclusions.

2. The experiment

The experimental part of this study aims to offer a preliminary analysis of how advanced L2 students classify English accents. The subjects chosen for this study were

seven 2nd year postgraduate (i.e. Laurea Specialistica) students enrolled on a course in International Communication at the Faculty of Modern Languages of the University of Genoa. The subjects took part in the experiment, conducted in a computer laboratory, at the very beginning of a course on Varieties of English and, therefore, the results obtained were not influenced by the (subsequent) teaching administered to them. Immediately prior to the experiment, the subjects were asked to fill in a questionnaire so as to collect information about their linguistic background and to assess their exposure to spoken English. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix A and the results obtained are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. The questionnaire results

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Fm	I	10y	no	d	c	RI (9m)/NI (2w)	05, RI, 1w	c	b	c	no
Sm, e	F	12y	no	b	a	-	-	b	a	b	yes
Nm	I	15y	no	b	a	-	-	c	b	a	no
Of	U	5y	no	b	a	E (3m)	01, E, 3m	c	b	b	yes
Ff	I	13y	no	c	b	E (3m), RI (1w)	02, RI, 1w	c	b	b	yes
Pf	I	13y	no	c	b	E (2m)	98, E, 3w	c	b	b	yes
Sf	I	15y	no	c	b	E&S (2w)	98, E&S, 2w	d	b	b	yes

Abbreviations
n. 1: F/S/etc.=name initial, m=male, f=female, e=Erasmus student
n. 2: I=Italian, F=French, U=Ukranian
n. 3: y=year(s), m=month(s), w=week(s) [also for questions nos. 7 and 8]
n. 5: a=never, b=occasionally, c=often, d=more than twice a year
n. 6: see n. 5
n. 7: RI=Republic of Ireland, NI=Northern Ireland, E=England [also for question n. 8], S=Scotland
n. 9: a=never, b=occasionally, c=often, d=almost every day
n. 10: see n. 9
n. 11: see n. 9

As Table 1 shows, four subjects are female students and three male students. Five of them are Italian native speakers, one is an Ukranian speaker (living permanently in Italy) and one is a French speaker (temporally in Italy on the Erasmus exchange programme). In general, the students seem to be frequently exposed to spoken English (see column 9; but note that a proper quantification of what "often" means has not been provided in the questionnaire) although such exposure is mainly passive. Interaction in English with either native or non-native speakers (see columns 10 and 11) takes place only occasionally. Also, with the exception of subject Fm (who spent one week in the Republic of Ireland in 2005), all students had either no or little recent exposure to English in 'natural' (i.e. English-speaking) contexts (see columns 7 and 8). Observe that one of the cells (row Of, column 6) has been shaded. This is meant to visualise the fact that the answer provided to question 6 ("How often do you travel abroad?") by subject O is inconsistent with the information provided relative to questions 7 and 8 ("Which English speaking countries have you visited and for how long?" and "When was the last time you visited an English-speaking country?", respectively). Since questions 7 and 8 required some elaboration on the part of the students, one can safely assume that Fm simply ticked the wrong box in question 6. Finally, most of the subjects (five out of seven) had attended English language modules where some English phonology was taught. The assumption underlying this question was that the explicit teaching of English

phonology may increase students' awareness of different English accents (at least as far as the main accents are concerned), see also Schimdt (1990) on the notion of "noticing".

After completing the questionnaire, the subjects (provided with headphones) were asked to listen on their computers to the same text read by eight different native speakers with different accents. The task consisted in identifying each accent according to the hierarchical schema reproduced (for audiofile n. 1) in Appendix B. The students listened to each file simultaneously since the playing of each audiofile was controlled by the author. Each file was played twice but not consecutively. The subjects first listened to the whole sequence of eight files (from n. 1 to n. 8) and then listened to them again in the same order. The underlying assumption was that in this way the subjects would probably have a better chance to identify differences between the various files (compared to the case where they might have listened to each file twice, the second time immediately after the first time). After having formed a general "impression" of the various accents, they would be better equipped to narrow down their identification during the second round of the listening task. The subjects were given a few minutes before the beginning of the listening task to familiarize themselves with the content of the text (which appeared on their computer screens) and were also allowed to inspect the text during the task (the screen available to the subjects can be viewed at http://www.broccias.net/research/ experiment.htm). Before the beginning of the experiment the students were also allowed to familiarize themselves with the schema reproduced in Appendix B. The audiofiles were taken from IDEA, the International Dialects of English Archive (see http://web.ku.edu/idea), which was preferred to other free-access archives like the BBC Voices archive (see http://www.bbc.co.uk/ voices/recordings/) and the British Library collection (see http://www.collectbritain.co.uk/ collections/dialects/) because IDEA makes use of identical reading texts (alongside a few minutes of monologue, during which each speaker talks about his/her life) for its recordings. The two texts used in IDEA are called *The Rainbow Passage* and *Comma Gets a Cure*. Both texts have been written so as to test the pronunciation of the standard lexical sets identified by Wells (1982: Ch. 2)[1]. Since *Comma Gets a Cure* has by now replaced *The Rainbow Passage* (and, hence, many more recordings are available that use it), audiofiles containing readings of *Comma Gets a Cure* were the obvious choice. The passage is reproduced below.

Comma Gets a Cure

Well, here's a story for you: Sarah Perry was a veterinary nurse who had been working daily at an old zoo in a deserted district of the territory, so she was very happy to start a new job at a superb private practice in North Square near the Duke Street Tower. That area was much nearer for her and more to her liking. Even so, on her first morning, she felt stressed. She ate a bowl of porridge, checked herself in the mirror and washed her face in a hurry. Then she put on a plain yellow dress and a fleece jacket, picked up her kit and headed for work. When she got there, there was a woman with a goose waiting for her. The woman gave Sarah an official letter from the vet. The letter implied that the animal could be suffering from a rare form of foot and mouth disease, which was surprising, because normally you would only expect to see it in a dog or a goat. Sarah was sentimental, so this made her feel sorry for the beautiful bird.

---

[1] The standard lexical sets are KIT, DRESS, TRAP, LOT, STRUT, FOOT, BATH, CLOTH, NURSE, FLEECE, FACE, PALM, THOUGHT, GOAT, GOOSE, PRICE, CHOICE, MOUTH, NEAR, SQUARE, START, NORTH, FORCE, CURE, happY, lettER, and commA. They identify word clusters and are argued by Wells (1982) to be more useful than phonemic inventories for comparative purposes.

Before long, that itchy goose began to strut around the office like a lunatic, which made an unsanitary mess. The goose's owner, Mary Harrison, kept calling, "Comma, Comma," which Sarah thought was an odd choice for a name. Comma was strong and huge, so it would take some force to trap her, but Sarah had a different idea. First she tried gently stroking the goose's lower back with her palm, then singing a tune to her. Finally, she administered ether. Her efforts were not futile. In no time, the goose began to tire, so Sarah was able to hold onto Comma and give her a relaxing bath.

Once Sarah had managed to bathe the goose, she wiped her off with a cloth and laid her on her right side. Then Sarah confirmed the vet's diagnosis. Almost immediately, she remembered an effective treatment that required her to measure out a lot of medicine. Sarah warned that this course of treatment might be expensive — either five or six times the cost of penicillin. I can't imagine paying so much, but Mrs. Harrison — a millionaire lawyer — thought it was a fair price for a cure.

The eight accents used in the sample were 1) Australian, 2) Irish (Dublin), 3) New Zealand, 4) South-West England (Bristol), 5) Scottish, 6) North England (Lancashire), 7) American (Wisconsin), and, as described in IDEA, 8) "slight London accent". After listening to each file, students were given a few moments to identify the accent by completing the schema reproduced in Appendix B. Observe that the schema is made up of two macro-levels. The first level is level 1 at the top, which accounts for the possibility of the subject's being unable to identify the accent being tested. The second macro-level is made up of the three tree diagrams, each comprising four or five levels. The three tree diagrams identify three major geographical varieties, British Isles accents, North American accents, and Southern Hemisphere accents. Each diagram allows for finer-grained identification of the various audiofiles by providing increasingly more specific geographical varieties as one moves down the tree. In fact, the subject himself/herself can provide further details (as to the origin of the accents) at level 5 in the British Isles tree and at level 4 for North American and Southern Hemisphere accents.

Although the subjects were asked to complete the trees in Appendix B after each file had been played the first time, they were allowed to change their answers when they listened to the files again. (Remember that the sequence according to which they were played was {audiofile n. 1, n. 2, n. 3...; audiofile n. 1, n. 2, n. 3...} rather than {audiofile n. 1, n. 1, n. 2, n. 2, n. 3, n. 3...}.) They were also provided with a few blank lines for each file as is shown in Appendix C for audiofile n. 1. In general, the answers provided for this task were very difficult to understand and therefore, with one exception mentioned in section 3 below, they were ignored in the analysis of the experiment. The subjects' answers clearly showed that the teaching of English phonology administered to the subjects (five of them, see above) had been ineffective. No student used an appropriate phonology/phonetics vocabulary to describe their perception and/or classification of the accents.[2]

The results of the classificatory task are shown in some detail in Table 2 below and are given in a more reader-friendly (and compact) fashion in Table 3.

---

[2] A reviewer observes that this conclusion is not sound because it contradicts the instructions provided in Appendix C (students were not asked to use a technical vocabulary if they did not want to). However, if the phonology/phonetics teaching had been effective, the use of a, at least mildly, technical vocabulary should have been the norm. After all, as one would expect a physics student to use an appropriate vocabulary to describe some physical phenomenon (without necessarily being too technical about it), one could expect a language student to do the same when asked to describe pronunciation.

Table 2. Detailed breakdown of the results

subject	audiofiles							
	1 (Aust)	2 (Dublin)	3 (NZ)	4 (Bristol)	5 (Scot)	6 (Lanc)	7 (WI)	8 (Lond)
Fm	non-RP	GA	Scot	Eng	SA	non-RP	NE	non-RP
Sm, e	Scot	Canadian	NE	Southern	NZ	NZ	GA	Australia
Nm	RP	NA	SA	BI	SH	SH	NA	Aust
Of	RP	NA	SH	England	SA	non-RP	GA	non-RP
Ff	non-RP	GA	non-RP	Southern	Aust	North	non-GA	non-RP
Pf	Wales	GA	Scot	non-GA	SA	North	non-GA	BI
Sf	Eire	Canadian	Aust	Scot	SA	Aust	GA	BI

Abbreviations (see Appendix B for the classificatory meanings of the labels)
Aust=Australasia
BI=British Isles
Eng=English
GA=General American
Lanc=Lancashire
Lond=London
NA=North America
NE=Northeastern
NZ=New Zealand
SA=South African
Scot=Scottish
SH=Southern Hemisphere
WI=Wisconsin

Table 3. Experimental results

native accent	classified as ... by *n* L2 students out of 7 (n/7)
1. Australian	British Isles 7/7
2. Irish (Dublin)	North American 7/7
3. New Zealand	Scottish 3/7; Australasia 4/7
4. South-West England (Bristol)	British Isles 4/7; North American 3/7
5. Scottish	Southern Hemisphere 7/7
6. North England (Lancashire)	British Isles 4/7; Southern Hemisphere 3/7
7. Wisconsin	North American 7/7
8. slight London accent	British Isles 5/7; Australasia 2/7

3. Discussion

The data collected warrant two main conclusions. First, they show that the subjects have a well-entrenched model for a North American English accent since they were all able to identify audiofile n. 7 (Wisconsin) as such (but observe that they differed as to its finer-grained identification. Two of the subjects, for example, classified it as being non-General American). The subjects also seem to have a less entrenched model for some sort of British accent. Note, for example, that five out of seven identified audiofile n. 8 ("slight London accent"), which was the closest to RP, correctly. In view of the preceding observation concerning the entrenchment of the North American English model, one may however speculate that the British accent is in fact cognitively represented as a non-North American English accent. But further research is needed to confirm that this is indeed the case. It must also be pointed out that all subjects, including Fm who had spent nine months in the Republic of Ireland and two weeks in

Northern Ireland, mistook the Dublin accent (audiofile n. 3) for a North American accent. Nevertheless, it should be remarked that rhoticity alone is not sufficient to explain this result since the Scottish accent was not classified as North American.

In general, and this is the second main conclusion we can draw from the data, "Scottish" and "Australasian" seem to have been used as 'dustbin' categories. Still, the classification of Scottish English as a Southern Hemisphere accent is intriguing. The only clue as to why this type of classification obtained can be found in one of the comments the subjects provided (i.e. when they were asked to explain their choices, see Appendix C): "I make this choice, as I think I can find a pinch of Dutch accent in the speaker's pronunciation. This can be highlighted by the particular pronunciation of some words like *price*, *mess* and so on, whose sound resembles the one of a German word" (Pf). At present, one can only speculate that this line of reasoning was also adopted by the other subjects.

4. Implications for the teaching of English pronunciation

All in all, the subjects used in the present study seem to have little knowledge of the different (native) English accents. If this observation can be generalised to the (Italian) student population at large – as may well be hypothesised since the subjects were Specialistica (and hence, supposedly, more advanced) students – the present study may turn out to be of some importance because it can be tied in with the current debate on the teaching of English pronunciation. In particular, I will try to argue that some present-day approaches (i.e. the 'core' approaches, see below), as compared to more traditional approaches, are potentially detrimental in two respects, firstly because they do not increase foreign students' awareness of native English accents and secondly (and more generally) because they may hinder students' communication potential. My conclusion is that traditional approaches should be not discarded and replaced with new (i.e. 'core') approaches but, rather, we should make sure that traditional approaches are implemented effectively (a similar point is also made by Kuo 2006).

At present, two main types of teaching approaches can be identified as far as the teaching of English pronunciation is concerned. One is the so-called NRP/RP (i.e. Non-Regional Pronunciation/Received Pronunciation) model[3], which has resulted in a wealth of teaching material such as Boweler *et al.* (2002), Cook (2000), Hancock (2003), Jordan (2003), Vaughan-Rees (2002), just to mention some recent works. This approach aims to teach foreign students the standard English or American accent. Students are not only asked to become aware of such accents but also to try to reproduce their features (i.e. their phonological inventories as well as aspects of connected speech and intonation patterns).

---

[3] The acronym NRP is used for example by Collins and Mees (2003). It can also be understood as a pun on Received Pronunciation since it could be interpreted as New Received Pronunciation. However, Collins and Mees point out that the new model of a non-geographically defined pronunciation which is spreading across England should not be referred to as RP because it lacks any social (i.e. middle/upper-class) connotations, unlike the traditional label RP.

The other major approach was promoted originally by Jenkins (2000) under the label of "Lingua Franca Core". "Lingua Franca" refers to the use of English as a linguistic medium among (almost exclusively) non-native speakers of English who do not share a common native language (as is often the case in business-related contexts, e.g. between Chinese and Italian business partners). Jenkins' main contention is that only those features which are essential for intelligibility should be taught. Such features are called 'core' features, hence the label "Lingua Franca Core"[4]. For example, the fact that in RP two allophones of /l/ are used, i.e. clear [l] (as in *lit*) and dark [ɫ] (as in *hill*), is regarded as superfluous since the use of the 'easier' variant, i.e. clear *l*, does not engender confusion (in fact, some native varieties like Irish English usually make use of clear *l* in all contexts, see e.g. Trudgill and Hannah 2002).

Of course, Jenkins' approach presupposes that it is indeed possible to identify core features (which must be evaluated with respect to learners' native languages) even if one (trivially) observes a great variability in the phonological inventories of the various world's languages. Ultimately, the possibility of identifying core features – ideally valid for all students of English worldwide – is a matter of empirical investigation and hence cannot be discussed any further here. Rather, I will limit myself to some observations which highlight some potentially problematic points made by proponents of the core approach. In what follows, I will mainly draw from Jenkins' (2003, 2004) recent work and I will conclude my discussion with some more general observations based on my understanding of the core approach.

Jenkins (2003: 125) claims that "[c]ore approaches to EIL [English as an International Language, CB] pronunciation take as their starting point the fact that for various reasons, the world's two prestige accents of English, Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) no longer provide the best goals for L2 learners. This is particularly true of RP, whose L1 speakers now constitute less than 3 per cent of the British population."[5] Two observations are in order here. First, the view that RP should not be used as one of the models for English pronunciation may also be shared by proponents of more traditional approaches. As was pointed out in note 2, scholars have recognised the need to refer to a new pronunciation model for England (rather than Britain), called NRP (Non-Regional Pronunciation). Importantly, this new model is non-class specific and thus nullifies Jenkins' (2003: 125) observation that "[n]ot only is RP a minority accent, but its origins in the English public school system and a social élite from London and the Home Counties is nowadays felt to be more of an embarrassment than an advantage in many parts of the world". Secondly, the percentage argument is obviously not valid for GA and, therefore, it is a logical fallacy to use it (for both RP and GA) against the teaching of prestige models in general.

Jenkins (2003: 125) also contends that a model like RP should not be used because "[m]ore importantly [...] RP is not one of the easiest accents for an L2 learner to acquire either productively [...] or receptively because of its extensive use of weak forms". This argument is based on the assumption that there are some accents which are easier to

---

[4] As will also be pointed out below, Jenkins' approach does not only involve pronunciation but also lexis and grammar.
[5] Notice incidentally that, as a reviewer correctly points out, there is no reason to assume that the percentage of RP speakers was in fact ever greater than 3%.

acquire than others. But this cannot be taken for granted and should be proved experimentally. Incidentally, such a position is reminiscent of the well-known fallacy that the grammars of certain languages are easier than those of others (e.g. English vs. Latin, see Brinton 2000: Ch. 1 for some discussion). Hence, empirical evidence is needed to prove that this may indeed be the case at least in the realm of phonology and phonetics. Further, to avoid teaching and/or using a native model like RP because it is difficult is not necessarily a good argument, especially if there are advantages in acquiring or being familiar with such a model. NRP, for example, can in theory allow users to interact satisfactorily with both non-native speakers and native speakers whereas the latter option (i.e. successful communication with native speakers) cannot be taken for granted within core approaches. Core approaches are geared to effective communication among non-native speakers only.

Jenkins (2003: 125) claims that core approaches also account for the fact that "learners are more frequently voicing a desire to preserve something of their L1 accent as a means of expressing their own identity in English". However, this claim is contradicted by what is mentioned for example in Jenkins (2004: 67). She reports on research done by Suzuki in Japan which shows that Japanese student-teacher subjects agreed most strongly with the statement "I need English for international communication" but also with "I want to acquire a native speaker accent". Further, and more importantly, Jenkins' argument neglects the very well-known fact that production (be it phonological or grammatical) will almost invariably be influenced by one's native language(s). Finally, if non-native speakers are aware of native features (although incapable of implementing them in native-like fashion), they may actually be able to communicate more effectively among them. If (only few) native models for the teaching of English pronunciation are used, then non-native speakers may relate their as well as other non-native speakers' productions to the same models. To put it simply, using non-native models effectively may be easier if there is a *tertium comparationis* (i.e. a native variety used as a model).

Alongside these specific objections, one can identify other more general weak points in Jenkins' core approach. This model does not seem to distinguish between production and perception. Of course, foreign students of English cannot be expected to acquire a native accent. However, this does not mean that we should not (mainly) use native speaker materials; native speaker materials are conducive to the development of (native) accent awareness. Accent awareness should be distinguished from language production, which will inevitably be influenced by one's native language(s), as was pointed out above. By conflating production and perception there is a serious risk of hindering students' understanding of as many accents as possible (including, especially, native accents).

Core approach proponents also seem to argue that since English is often used in business-oriented communication among non-native speakers, then non-native teachers of English should also resort to a core approach in their teaching. This line of reasoning is however problematic because it makes the a priori assumption that the most important type of communication is that involving business English. Further, the use of NRP and/or GA may be more rewarding cross-culturally in that it can contribute to a better appreciation of both non-native accents *and* English accents[6].

---

[6] Exposure to native varieties can, rather trivially, increase the students' abilities to understand natural conversation among native speakers (e.g. films, television programmes, etc.). Although this may not be of much

Core approaches do not seem to differentiate sufficiently between native and non-native varieties. The two types cannot have the same status for the very simple reason that most of the times non-native varieties are not used to express the same range of functions as native varieties.[7] In particular, core approaches do not consider the importance of the emotive and phatic functions of language but rather concentrate on language as an instrument for information transfer (cf. the emphasis placed on business-oriented communication). At the very least, it is difficult to see how core approaches may be extended to express emotive and phatic functions, whose realisations obviously differ from culture to culture (see also the brief discussion of idioms below).

Finally, it is intuitively difficult to understand how learners of English can make an informed choice between English as a Lingua Franca (i.e. the teaching of English through a core approach) and English as a Foreign Language (i.e. the teaching of English based on more traditional, native speaker models), as hypothesised by Jenkins (2004). With the exception of immediate needs serving very specific purposes (e.g. business-communication), the majority of learners (i.e. school children) simply cannot know what use, if any, they will put their knowledge of English to. Hence, it is debatable that the teaching of a simplified version of the language should always be an option (see, for example, the unsuccessful attempts at developing artificial languages like Esperanto or simplified versions of English such as Basic English). After all, as has been abundantly shown in second language acquisition studies (see e.g. Bettoni 2002 for a useful overview of the interlanguage literature), language acquisition proceeds along well-defined acquisition paths. More "complex" features are automatically filtered out by L2 learners at lower levels of competence. In other words, there is no reason why at higher levels of linguistic competence students should not be taught more complex features of the target language.

In general, even if core approaches are, at least in the eyes of their proponents, inspired by a commendable 'democratic' view of language use (i.e. native speakers should not perceive themselves as the owners of the 'true' and 'correct' English),[8] the notion of English teaching that emerges is potentially limited in that it highlights a very business-oriented view of language, where only the informative function is taken into consideration. This is clearly manifest in the quotation below, which shows that Jenkins is advocating a simplified version of English *tout court*, that is, involving both phonological *and* lexicogrammatical features are concerned.

> For example, they [i.e. publishers, CB] could provide materials showing teachers how to use the intelligibility criterion in order to base pronunciation teaching on local but internationally

use from a business-oriented point of view, it is nevertheless conducive to a better appreciation of the culture of English-speaking countries, for example.

[7] By non-native varieties, I am referring here to those varieties used by non-native speakers in a limited number of settings rather than so-called postcolonial Englishes (which, for example, are used in written publications like novels and newspapers and thus cover a wider variety of functions).

[8] Although this goes beyond the scope of the present paper, one could perhaps argue that the burgeoning field of English as a Lingua Franca, although possibly inspired by 'democratic' principles, may result in an even wider expansion of the English teaching industry, which in turn may hinder an objective evaluation of its effectiveness. Significantly, Bailey (1992) reminds us of what "[a] Pakistani observer, somewhat hyperbolically, has suggested: 'Teaching English has become a multimillion-dollar business the world over, a lucrative business next only to drug trafficking' (Larik 1981-82, 77)".

intelligible accents, rather than on traditional NS models. They could provide guidelines for the
teaching of lexicogrammar which avoided NS idioms, as these have already been shown in the
research to be a major cause of lexicogrammatical intelligibility problems. (Jenkins 2004: 66-
67)

However, the need for simplification, which is of course justified when teaching
involves lower level students, cannot necessarily translate into simplification across the
board, at all levels of competence and in all circumstances. Such a move may end up
limiting students' communication potential as well as their appreciation of native
varieties and native speakers' cultures.

5. Conclusion

This paper comprised two parts. In the first part, I reported on an experiment
conducted with advanced learners of English at the Faculty of Modern Languages in
Genoa. The subjects showed little ability to differentiate native varieties of English, with
the exception of American English and, to a lesser extent, British English. In other
words, they exhibit little phonological awareness even if they are advanced students and
are studying English at postgraduate level as one of their main subjects. If the results
obtained in this study can be generalised to the (Italian) student population at large, the
conclusion to be drawn is that English language students should be administered more
teaching on English phonetics and phonology and, more generally, varieties of English.
This is especially important, of course, for language students, for whom the development
of language awareness should be one of the top priorities and one of their main
objectives.

In the second part of this paper, I argued that the experimental results could (and
perhaps should) also be discussed against the background of current approaches to the
teaching of English pronunciation. After all, if language is communication (in its
broadest sense) then comprehension means having familiarity with various different
varieties. I pointed out that Jenkins' core approach, which aims to replace traditional
teaching techniques based on the use of native models with a simplified version of the
English language, is potentially problematic (see also the attempts at developing
simplified versions of English like Basic English) both conceptually and empirically, for
a variety of reasons. If we opt for a core approach, language and intercultural awareness
may be hindered rather than promoted. Further, core approaches may be
counterproductive even in those settings where some knowledge of the differences
existing among varieties of English should be enhanced, e.g. in Modern Languages
faculties. Advanced students already seem to have little knowledge of geographical
varieties of English and it is very difficult to see how the possible general spread of
approaches focussing on notions like 'difficulty' and 'informative function' may lead to
rectifying this situation. Finally, we should not forget the lesson of language acquisition
studies: students automatically transfer features from their native languages into the
target language and operate simplifications. Hence, it may be inconsequential to
advocate the teaching of a simplified version of the English language. This is especially
so since the traditional teaching that the core approach is meant to replace is based on

graded learning. In other words, simplification is already a necessary part of the traditional model at lower levels of competence.

Ultimately, the emphasis on the need for flattening e.g. the English phonemic inventory, as the proponents of the English as a Lingua Franca model advocate, may be taken as symptomatic of a more general and widespread cultural flattening. It may also be viewed as a relatively recent phenomenon if set against the communicative approaches of the 1970s and 1980s, which did focus on exposure to different varieties of (native) English. In this sense, English as a Lingua Franca, although apparently inspired by an "egalitarian" agenda (i.e. the recognition of the existence of a non-native, international variety of English which is not inferior in any way to native varieties) may simply be one more product of a globalized market. It entails a decrease in cultural awareness, it emphasises an instrumental view of language and it creates one more niche in the (already very profitable) English language teaching market.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

1. Name or ID: ....

2. I'm a native speaker of ....

3. If you are not an English native speaker, how long have you been studying
English? ....

4. Have you got any certificates (e.g. PET, FCE, CAE, etc.)? (Give also grades)
....
....

5. How often do you travel abroad? □ never □ occasionally □ often □ more than twice a year

6. How often do you travel to travel to English-speaking countries?
□ never □ occasionally □ often □ more than twice a year

7. Which English speaking countries have you visited and for how long?
....
....
....
....

8. When was the last time you visited an English-speaking country?
year: ....
country: ....
weeks/months: ....

9. How often do you watch/listen to English TV/radio/films?
□ never □ occasionally □ often □ almost every day

10. How often do you talk with native speakers?
□ never □ occasionally □ often □ almost every day

11. How often do you talk in English with non-native speakers of English?
□ never □ occasionally □ often □ almost every day

12. Have you taken any English phonology courses? If so, when and for how long?
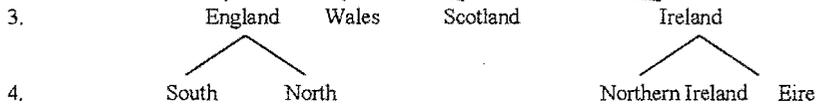
Appendix B

Instructions

After listening to each audio file (once), circle the region where you think the speaker is from (**level 1**). If you are not sure, circle *don't know*.
If you can, specify the accent in more detail by circling the appropriate labels from **level 2** downwards (but you can stop at whatever level you like).
You can also provide additional information (i.e. specify the region in more detail, e.g. Glasgow, Edinburgh, etc. for "Scotland") where you find the dotted line.

<u>File n. 1</u>

1.   **don't know**

1.   **British Isles**

2.   RP   non-RP

3.   England   Wales   Scotland   Ireland

4.   South   North   Northern Ireland   Eire

5. more details: ....

1.   **North America**

2.   GA   non-GA

3.   Southern   Northeastern   Canadian

4. more details: ....

1.   **Southern Hemisphere**

2.   South Africa   Australasia

3.   Australia   New Zealand
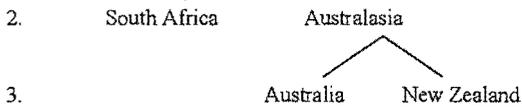
4. more details: ....

Appendix C

Listen to each audio file again. Which features, if any, enabled you to identify the accent? (You can answer in English or Italian and you shouldn't worry about using the appropriate technical terms.)

File n. 1

....

....

....

....

....

Bibliography

BAILEY R., [1991] 1992, *Images of English: A Cultural History of the Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

BETTONI C., 2002, *Imparare un'altra lingua: Lezioni di linguistica applicata*, Laterza, Bari-Roma.

BOWELER B., CUNNINGHAM S., MOOR P. and PARMINTER S., 2002, *New Headway Pronunciation* (various levels), Oxford University Press, Oxford.

BRINTON L., 2000, *The Structure of Modern English*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

COLLINS B. and MEES I., 2003, *Practical Phonetics and Phonology*, Routledge, London.

COOK A., 2000, *American Accent Training*, Barron's, Hauppauge, NY.

HANCOCK M., 2003, *English Pronunciation in Use*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

JENKINS J., 2000, *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

JENKINS J., 2003, *World Englishes*, Routledge, London.

JENKINS J., 2004, "ELF at the Gate: The Position of English as a Lingua Franca", *The European English Messenger* 13.2, pp. 63-69.

JORDAN M., 2003, *Phonetics for Learners of English Pronunciation*, Celtic Publications, Dublin.

KUO I-CHUN, 2006, "Addressing the Issue of Teaching English as a Lingua Franca", *ELT Journal* 60.3, pp. 213-221.

LARIK K., 1981-82, "English as an International Language", *Ariel* (Jamshoro) 7, pp. 75-80.

SCHMIDT R., 1990, "The Role of Consciousness in Second Language Learning", *Applied Linguistics* 11.2, pp. 129-158.

TRUDGILL P. and HANNAH J., 2002, *International English: A Guide to the Varieties of Standard English*, Arnold, London.

VAUGHAN-REES M., 2002, *Test Your Pronunciation*, Penguin, London.

WELLS J. C., 1982, *Accents of English 1: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.