

Critical Issues for 21st Century ELT: What English? Whose methods? Which culture?

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Characteristics of 'English as a Lingua Franca' ('ELF')

Pronunciation:

Jenkins (1996) found that a number of common 'departures' from native-speaker pronunciation models (RP or GA) did not in fact cause misunderstanding:

/θ/ as /t/ or /s/

/ð/ as /d/ or /z/

'Mixing' rhotic 'r' into RP-based accents: Rhotic 'r' is recommended

But the following are *necessary* for understanding:

- Aspirate word-initial /p/, /t/, /k/
- Shorten vowels before voiceless consonants: not /bi:t/ but /bit/ in 'The dog bit the man'
- Pronounce all consonants in a cluster at the beginning of a word: 'promise', 'string' (Adding vowels to a cluster is more intelligible than deleting elements in a cluster).

Lexicogrammar:

Seidlhofer (2004) discovered that the following frequent 'departures' from native speaker grammar do not interfere with understanding in conversations between non-native speakers:

- Use of same verb form for all simple present verbs, e.g. 'He look very sad'
- Not putting definite or indefinite article in front of nouns, e.g. 'our countries have signed agreement'
- Using just the verb stem (not '-ing' form) in constructions such as 'I look forward to see you tomorrow'
- Using 'isn't it?' or 'no?' as a universal tag question (e.g. 'You're very busy today, isn't it? / no?')
- Use of *that*-clauses rather than infinitive-constructions (e.g. 'I want that we go')
- 'Redundant' explicitness (e.g. 'black colour', not just 'black')

The following *do* cause communication problems:

- Unfamiliarity with a vocabulary item (especially when there is lack of skill in use of communication strategies, e.g. paraphrasing).
- 'Unilateral idiomaticity' (e.g. 'this drink is on the house', 'can we give you a hand?')

Research is still in the early stages (see VOICE website for updates). But what might be the practical implications of such findings?