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The purpose of this book is to give teachers access to practical aspects of phonetics, phonology and pronunciation. In this chapter, we lay out the road map for that journey, but let's first explore your own beliefs about language, accents, and learning and teaching pronunciation.

ACTIVITY 1.1

A. On paper, rate the following statements as *True*, *False*, *Maybe* or *Trick*, according to your beliefs. You will need your answers for the next activities.

1. Children get their accents from their parents.
2. Language X (your choice) is the hardest language to learn to speak.
3. You can't change the accent of someone who has been speaking English for a long time.
4. There are computer programs or language programs that can teach you to sound like a native.
5. We should try to help our students sound like native speakers so that they can blend in.
6. Everyone has an accent.
7. If I want to teach pronunciation, I have to learn anatomy and a new system of symbols.
8. We don't have enough class time to teach pronunciation.
9. Teaching pronunciation involves more than just individual sounds.

10. This book will give me all the techniques and tools I need to teach pronunciation.
 11. There are some practical applications of phonetics and pronunciation.
- B. Compare your answers either with a partner or the class, according to the wishes of your instructor. Discuss why you chose what you did and see if your partners can change your mind or if you can change theirs.

Now let's look at the accepted 'truths' in our profession. How do these 'truths' compare with your intuitions or ideas? It may take a couple of classes to go over these eleven statements, so take your time. These answers might be called the 'accepted wisdom' of our profession. Notice that we didn't say 'the correct answer'. Having correct answers would be too easy. Rather, our 'model' answers reflect what we have learned from both experience and research so far. Perhaps there will be changes in what we believe in the future. Perhaps someone will develop a machine or pill that erases all traces of 'foreign' accents, although we doubt that will happen.

Remember that even if we say something is true or false, there will always be exceptions or rare cases, since we are dealing with humans. For example, even though Mozart composed music and played the violin and piano at the age of five, it is still a fact that children are not exceptional musicians at five.

1. Children get their accents from their parents. *False.* This fact bothers parents, but children *acquire* (unconsciously learn) their accents from their peers and the children who are just a little older than they are. And no, it's not teachers who teach children to speak their native language either. If it were the case that children acquired their accents from their parents, the children of immigrants would have 'foreign' accents. In spite of their father's famous accent, Arnold Schwarzenegger's children

speak with a standard American English accent, as they grew up in California.

Even more convincing is the fact that the *hearing children of deaf parents* **speak** the language of their hearing peers absolutely normally, or that the *deaf children of hearing parents* are able to **sign** without a non-native ‘accent’ in their signed language.

2. Language X is the hardest language to learn to speak. *Maybe.*

Let’s quickly get the idea that everyone learns languages at the same speed, the same way or even for the same reason out of the picture immediately. Each learner and indeed each learning context is unique. How difficult a language is for each learner depends on many factors that we explore later in Chapters 4 and 7.

Let’s briefly say that the ease or difficulty of learning a language generally depends on the age at which learners started to learn to speak that new language and what language(s) they spoke before. It may even depend on the type of society they come from. And perhaps most importantly, it depends on the motivation of the learner. So, yes, this is a very definite ‘maybe’.

If you think English, or any other language for that matter, is the hardest language to learn, you are both right and wrong. It depends on who is doing the learning. Regardless of the relative difficulty in learning English, as you will see in Chapter 6, English has become the world’s first truly international or global language, so we can refer to **English as an International Language** (EIL). We can even refer to it as **English as a Lingua Franca** (ELF), a term we explore in Chapter 6.

The global status of English means that it must be learnable, but learning to speak can mean many things. For some learners, it might mean trying to sound as if they grew up in Dallas, London or Toronto. For others, it might be fine just to be fluent enough in English to be able to communicate a simple request for a cup of coffee with someone from a different country who doesn’t share their first language.

3. You can't change the accent of someone who's been speaking English for a while. *Maybe.* For many years, the term **fossilized** was used to say that once a learner's accent was, well, fossilized, it couldn't be altered. As we will see in Chapter 4, there is evidence that targeted **pronunciation** instruction can change accents for some speakers. However, again the word *motivation* is the main issue. Why would a speaker want to spend the effort to modify his or her accent if that person has been successful in communicating for years already? There must be a highly motivating reason or two to make the effort necessary to change worthwhile.

4. There are computer programs or language programs that can teach you to sound like a native. *False.* Well, it is false now, and it is likely to remain false for some time. It is true that some computer programs can help you a bit, but if a program were enough, the major computer-based language programs wouldn't be offering you a chance to interact with live human tutors for an additional fee.

One of the real problems in using computer programs, or even instructors for that matter, for pronunciation issues is that as an adult, you can't even hear the differences in sounds that might be important in a specific language. In Chapter 3, you will learn about **phonemes**, the significant sounds of a language. Sadly, usually once a person is in her or his late teens, the ability to distinguish all possible human language sounds is turned off. You basically only 'hear' (in other words, are able to notice) the differences that are important for your language(s). For example, you most likely know that it is usually difficult for speakers of English and most languages related to English (called the *Indo-European languages*) to distinguish between the **tones** of Chinese and the many other languages with developed tone systems because we don't have tones at the word level. Most likely you can't consistently hear the difference in the sound file in the four different words in Chinese that are all 'spelled' *ma* – *mā*, *má*, *mǎ* and *mà* – that

mean ‘mother’, ‘bother’, ‘horse’ and ‘scold’, respectively. The different tones are significant for Chinese speakers, but not for speakers of many other languages. That is an example of the ‘negative’ influence of the native language in learning a foreign language. The computer can’t hear those differences for you and can’t really teach you to make the difference any better than an instructor could and usually not as well. That said, there are some advances in feedback that may (and let’s stress *may*) be very effective in the future. Nonetheless, in Chapter 7, we discuss some uses of technology that can help, but they aren’t perfect. However, our motto is whatever works.

5. We should try to help our students sound like native speakers so that they can blend in. *False.* Unless you work for the CIA, SIS, MSS, GRU or another spy agency, or some call centres (and even they aren’t that successful), your goal should be intelligibility, not native speaker accuracy. Sounding like a native speaker would need to be the student’s goal (not the teacher’s goal for the student), and even then most learners aren’t successful.

It also is practical and realistic to say that our goal is **intelligibility**, as it is almost impossible to make adults, or even those in their late teens, sound ‘native’. As a side note, there is a lively discussion about whether ‘native’ accents actually do exist and what can be considered one; we discuss this further in Chapter 6. People who have learned a new language as adults and who manage to ‘pass’ as native speakers in a second language are the exceptions to the rule, for sure. Let’s return to Arnold Schwarzenegger. In spite of his obvious Austrian accent, he was elected governor of California. His accent didn’t hinder him; his ‘strong’ (a value judgement word we would prefer not to use) accent might have even helped, since it gave him a strong identity. If he had sounded just like any other American politician, he might not have been as successful. Of course, groups always consider some accents good and others bad. Educated Americans often swoon over an

upper-class British accent or any French accent while often viewing other accents as *déclassé*(s) or ugly, but that is a subjective opinion and not an objective fact. In theory, all accents, dialects and languages are equal. But just as was said in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, some 'are more equal than others'.

On the other hand, you might think about the seemingly endless list of Australian and British actors, such as Cate Blanchett, Hugh Laurie, Nicole Kidman or Simon Baker, who sound completely American in films and on television. Remember, however, that you only hear the success stories. If a mistake in accent/pronunciation is made during filming, the director shouts, 'Cut', and the mistake is erased. People don't get that chance when speaking in real-life situations. Also, these actors are exceptions, not the norm. Just think of how many truly dreadful fake British, Spanish and French accents in English you've heard from many Americans or British people. We'll talk more about the distinction between *intelligibility* and *accent* later on in Chapter 4.

6. Everyone has an accent. *True.* Yes, everyone has an accent. Many British and Americans think that their English is accent-free. First, both groups can't be right. If they didn't have an American/British accent, how would we know that they speak 'perfect' British or American? It is human nature to think that other people have accents; sadly, it's an 'us versus them' world. In Chapters 2 and 3, we discuss sounds and accents and see how even 'standard' accents can change over time. For example, not many Americans now pronounce the words *caught/cot* differently although there 'should' theoretically be a difference in Standard American English (SAE). However, that difference is disappearing in the United States. We call a pair of words, such as *caught/cot* that have, or should have, one difference in sound (not spelling!) a **minimal pair**. Other examples of minimal pairs would be *park/bark*, *rat/sat* or even *wind* (it up) and a (strong) *wind*, as we are listening to sounds, not looking at spelling.

ACTIVITY 1.2

True or false? Are the following pairs of words minimal pairs – that is do the words differ in exactly one sound? Say the words aloud to make sure you aren't being misled by spelling.

1. _____ polish (shoes)/Polish (person)
2. _____ great/grate
3. _____ sing/sung
4. _____ boy/toy
5. _____ though/dough

The accent issue also brings us back to intelligibility. Can the listener understand the speaker? Notice that we define intelligibility in terms of the listener, not the speaker. In Chapter 4, we look at research that shows that accent and intelligibility aren't always so easily related. A speaker can have a 'strong foreign accent' (there is that value judgement again) and still be very intelligible.

7. If I want to teach pronunciation, I have to learn anatomy and a new system of symbols. *Trick.* It helps to learn a few new parts of the mouth, such as the *velum* (soft **palate**) or the *uvula* (that thing that dangles at the back of your throat) or the *alveolar* (gum) ridge, as you will in Chapter 2. Generally, however, you will use basic terms you already know. Likewise, it helps to know the most common symbols of the **International Phonetic Alphabet** (IPA) to discuss pronunciation; however, you know most of the symbols for the most part from just knowing how to read the Latin alphabet (that's the one used in English). It's more an effort not to confuse letters with sounds. For example, the IPA symbol [g], shown in square brackets, always represents the first sound in *ghost*, never the first sound in *giraffe*; the first sound in *giraffe* is represented with [dʒ] by most Europeans and by [j] by many Americans. After you go through Chapter 2, you

will be able to transcribe most English words with a degree of accuracy. Knowing those symbols will help you be precise when teaching pronunciation, but it's not at all difficult. It is more important that you be able to 'read' the symbols than be able to produce them.

8. We don't have enough time to teach pronunciation. *False.* After WWII, there was a method you will learn more about in Chapter 4 that emphasized extensive repetition of sounds and oral dialogues, called the **Audio-lingual Method** (ALM). Students would spend hours in the language lab repeating minimal pairs, pairs of words that differ by exactly one sound, such as *sheep/ship*, into a tape recorder. For a very few students, that was effective; for most, it was a waste of time, tape and tempers. That experience left us with a bad taste in our mouth about pronunciation teaching.

Today, however, we know that targeted, extremely quick, explicit instruction (which the first author of this book calls **lightning drills**) can be very effective. We have learned that this truly is a case of 'less is more'. Think of these drills as a special case of '**comprehensible input**' that you create by focusing entirely on one form for a very brief period. By using lightning drills when appropriate, we can help our students improve through focused, appropriate intervention. If your students have no problem at all consistently saying the first sound represented by *th* in *thanks*, *thin*, *thick* or *thread* correctly, there is no reason to spend even a minute practising that sound just because there is an exercise in the textbook about it. We have plenty of time for the right kind of pronunciation teaching when it is necessary. Of course, that means that your first job is to determine what your students need to improve; every class will be slightly different, even if students are all from the same background. Finding out what your students need (and sometimes want) is called a needs analysis, which should be part of every teacher's basic activities. We use the mnemonic **PAY** (purpose, audience, you) to help remember to

carry out an extremely simplistic form of needs analysis every-time you enter a classroom.

9. Teaching pronunciation involves more than just individual sounds. *True.* As we see in Chapter 5, aspects of language, such as **stress, prosody and intonation**, which we call **suprasegmentals**, are also crucial in teaching language. Think of the early computer-generated voices. Each word existed in a universe of its own and sounded very odd. Today, some computers have been programmed with intonation, and sound much more natural. The same is true for language learners. At the same time, we will destroy the belief that teaching these aspects is difficult.

10. This book will give me all the techniques and tools I need to teach pronunciation. *Trick.* Obviously, a short book this size cannot begin to cover everything a teacher could or should know about pronunciation teaching. Instead, this book gives teachers a good start they can use as they learn to evaluate the PAY (purpose, audience and you) of each different learner and class. We created PAY to serve as a mnemonic for teachers to use as an abbreviated needs analysis for each class. Using PAY, this book helps teachers realize that every learner has a different *purpose*, is part of a different *audience* and that *you* as the teacher have your own strengths and challenges. Together these factors create PAY that permeates our discussion of teaching pronunciation. In fact, it forms the fourth *P* that we could add to the three *Ps* in the title of this book. If you are teaching now, stop and think about the PAY(s) of your class(es). If you are not teaching, think about possible PAYs. If you have been a language learner, do you think your instructors ever thought about the PAY? Or did they think they were just teaching non-existent so-called 'General English'? In fact, the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) expert Professor Liz England always jokes about TENAR – Teaching English for No Apparent Reason. This text helps you discover the PAYs you need and helps you teach for very apparent reasons.

ACTIVITY 1.3

We ask you to write a descriptive paragraph about yourself in the next activity, but for now, choose where you think you fit along these continua that describe different traits that influence how/what/why you teach. Remember that none of these traits is 'right' or 'wrong'. Rate how you are, not how you wish you could be or think you should be because someone once erroneously told you that 'all good teachers are...'. You may also be surprised by some of our dichotomies, but they've been chosen to assess what kind of a pronunciation teacher you might be or become. Were we talking about writing or grammar, they might be different.

1. _____ loud ...1...2...3...4...5... quiet
2. _____ likes deviating from plans ...1...2...3...4...5... hates deviating from plans
3. _____ organized ...1...2...3...4...5... disorganized
4. _____ wants theory ...1...2...3...4...5... wants results
5. _____ introvert ...1...2...3...4...5... extrovert
6. _____ native speaker of English ...1...2...3...4...5... non-native
7. _____ lesson plans ...1...2...3...4...5... teachable moments
8. _____ likes people ...1...2...3...4...5... likes books
9. _____ expert user of English ...1...2...3...4...5... non-expert
10. _____ male ...1...2...3...4...5... female

Compare your results with those of classmates, and predict how each of these pairs might influence what kind of a teacher each pair represents. What traits do you think would also be important for teaching pronunciation? Are there any traits that would be important for all types of teaching?

ACTIVITY 1.4

Write a descriptive paragraph about yourself and the type of teacher you are or think you will be. Although we can all improve, there is no right answer.

11. There are some practical applications of phonetics and pronunciation. *True.* We would imagine that you thought that statement was either false or a trick. For example, the use of pronunciation to separate friend from foe in warfare is as old as humankind, it appears. In the *Book of Judges*, a book of the (Old Testament/Hebrew) Bible, there is the story of the **shibboleth**, which originally just meant a stalk of grain. Once two closely related groups were fighting each other. As they didn't wear uniforms and were closely related, it was difficult to tell friend from foe. When suspected members of the losing group (the foe) were caught trying to sneak back to their own land, they were ordered to say that word: *shibboleth*. Unfortunately, for them, there was no *sh* [ʃ] sound in their dialect. As a result, they said *sibboleth* [*sic*] instead, as this was the way the word was pronounced in their dialect. Upon hearing the 'wrong' pronunciation, the winners killed those speakers. Since then, the word *shibboleth* has come to mean anything (a custom, a word, clothing, etc.) that separates one group from another, often in a negative sense. There are many other examples of pronunciation shibboleths throughout history that were used to separate friend from foe, usually resulting in a quick death for the speaker on the 'wrong' side of the pronunciation divide, such as the somewhat apocryphal Parsley Massacre in the Dominican Republic in 1937. It is said that Dominican soldiers distinguished between Dominican and Haitian civilians by asking them to pronounce the word *perejil* (parsley) and let them live or killed them on the basis of their pronunciation.

Pronunciation is indeed a major marker of group identity. A modern shibboleth is the pronunciation of the diphthong (type of **vowel** sound) in words such as *about* or *house* in many parts of Canada. Some American comedians love to make fun of the Canadian pronunciation of the sound represented most often by *ou* because it serves as a clear marker of people from that country. Not all Canadians use that pronunciation (yet?), but enough that it's become a shibboleth.

Fortunately, most of us will never have to use **phonetics** and pronunciation to identify terrorists, as is sometimes done today, or to kill our enemies, but we do use pronunciation every day to decide if people are 'like us or not like us'. As the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw (1913) wrote: 'It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him.' In that way, learning to talk about pronunciation can be very practical for us as teachers who are trying to help learners of English find their way in our societies and our world.

These eleven statements have helped us explore some of the more controversial issues of phonetics, **phonology** and pronunciation. Let's now go to a quick overview of each of the chapters so that you will know what to expect.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 2: Phonetics: Sounds and Symbols: We learn how human language sounds are produced and heard. Concentrating mainly on how sounds are produced, articulatory phonetics, you learn to transcribe and interpret the major notational systems, mainly the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), used for phonetics in ELT.

Chapter 3: Phonology: Language Systems: After examining the isolated sounds of language, we consider how sounds are combined to create phonological systems. More importantly, we explore how phonological systems from learners' native

languages influence Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in speech, writing and even reading. Using contrastive analysis, teachers learn to use their new knowledge to address issues arising from language or dialect differences they may encounter in their classrooms or work.

Chapter 4: Research and Pronunciation: After examining human sounds and sound systems, we look at the role of teaching pronunciation in major methodologies and approaches of English Language Teaching (ELT). We then survey scholarly and classroom research into producing and receiving spoken language, and identify gaps in the literature. The chapter ends with an extensive look at how best to identify and implement strategies for integrating pronunciation instruction in both the heterogeneous and homogenous classroom.

Chapter 5: Suprasegmentals: Bigger Than Words: This chapter examines the features of speech that include *tone*, *stress*, *prosody* and *intonation*. After examining the major views on the role of these and other suprasegmentals in language teaching, we ask readers to determine appropriate goals and techniques for identifying prosodic features of speech as well as rules and practice exercises to make the appropriate teaching of suprasegmentals more effective.

Chapter 6: Language Varieties and English as a Lingua Franca: The emergence of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has led to a shared ownership of the varieties of English by both native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS). This chapter discusses the topic of ELF as it relates to the teaching and learning of pronunciation in ESL and EFL contexts. It then develops the conversation further to examine the role of language varieties in the teaching of second and foreign languages. We refer to recent work that has been done on accent and identity, while asking readers to determine their own stance on the issues. Special emphasis is given to the role

of non-native teachers in the teaching of pronunciation as the majority of English teachers throughout the world are in fact non-natives.

Chapter 7: Technology and Pronunciation Teaching: This chapter first examines the history of the use and misuse of technology in teaching pronunciation and asks teachers to determine how they best think technology can be used to help students. Then, readers are shown how new research or technologies can provide better understanding of how to teach pronunciation and how teachers themselves can become better researchers. Finally, we ask teachers to reflect on how new technologies can be used appropriately to help students both understand and produce language.

Chapter 8: Final Thoughts: In this final chapter, we ask teachers to consider how they will continue to be both teachers and researchers in pronunciation. At the same time, we ask them to develop their own approach to implementing (or not implementing) pronunciation instruction into different curricula and syllabi.

Before we turn to the basic elements of language, individual sounds and phonetics, let's see if you have changed your mind about any of the eleven statements.

ACTIVITY 1.5

Quickly go over what you wrote about the eleven statements again, and see if you have changed your mind about any of your answers. As you worked through the statements of 'accepted wisdom', what surprised you most? Which are you still not sure about? What would it take to convince you?

Suggested Readings

Darcy, I., D. Ewert and R. Lidster (2012) Bringing Pronunciation Instruction Back into the Classroom: An ESL Teachers' Pronunciation 'Toolbox', in J. Levis and K. LeVelle, *Proceedings of the 3rd Annual Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University), pp. 93–108 (accessed from <http://jlevis.public.iastate.edu/Proceedingsfrom3rdPSLLT%20updated.pdf#page=98>).

This short article provides the reader with a quick and accurate overview of the problems faced by those who wish to teach pronunciation. More importantly, it provides a case study of how pronunciation can be implemented in an Intensive English Programme (IEP). The authors present good ideas on what the focus of pronunciation should be as English ability grows. This article appears in the third annual proceedings of one of the few annual conferences devoted to the teaching of pronunciation.

Grant, L. J., with D. Brinton and T. Derwing, M. J. Munro, J. Field, J. Gilbert, J. Murphy, et al. (2014) *Pronunciation Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).

Linda Grant is one of the most important voices in contemporary pronunciation instruction, especially in North America. In this volume, she has gathered many of the other major researchers in pronunciation. The prologue, written by Professor Grant, is an excellent overview of what areas teachers should know; although she says it is addressed to 'informed practitioners', you should work your way through the prologue slowly, noting what seems completely unknown and what you already know. After you finish our book, you should reread this prologue to see if you agree with her, and indeed with us, on what is important.