

**Jenkins, J. (2002). *A Sociolinguistically Based, Empirically Researched Pronunciation Syllabus for English as an International Language*. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(1), pp. 83-103.**

Jenkins' article argues for the adoption of a modified pronunciation syllabus to be used when teaching English as an international language. She begins by pointing out a need for this new syllabus citing the fact that non-native English speakers (NNSs) now outnumber native English speakers (NSs). This growing population of NNSs are using English differently now than they have historically due to the globalization of the English language. Specifically, Jenkins points out that these NNSs are more frequently interacting solely with other NNSs, using English as an international language or within their own country. Whereas in the past, pronunciation teaching was geared towards comprehensibility for NS listeners, Jenkins now believes that pronunciation needs to be geared towards the comprehensibility of NNSs since they are now in the majority.

After establishing this need, Jenkins goes on to describe the difference of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) where she says it is reasonable to teach pronunciation with the goal of sounding like a native speaker, and teaching English as an international language (EIL) where speakers of English are not considered foreign and should only consider accent modification in cases where it may impede intelligibility. Following the latter point, Jenkins suggests the possibility of establishing an international norm, as opposed to a NS norm. Citing the danger of phonological disintegration, where Englishes spoken throughout the world would diverge so much that they would become mutually unintelligible, Jenkins furthers her case for a pronunciation syllabus, arguing that a research-based pedagogy for EIL that promotes international phonological intelligibility would be of great benefit.

Next, Jenkins begins supplying examples of pronunciation-based miscommunication in what she refers to as "interlanguage talk" (ILT), which is talk between two NNSs. Jenkins' examples are drawn from data she collected herself over a period of three years which includes speech in classroom and social settings. Jenkins states that pronunciation was the most frequent cause of communication breakdown in her data. Her first five examples demonstrate communication breakdowns caused by the most problematic phonological errors such as speakers substituting a /p/ sound for an /f/ sound as in "pailed" rather than "failed" or a speaker placing the nuclear stress on the wrong word in a sentence. She follows each example with an

account of the reaction of the interlocutors which demonstrate the unintelligible nature of the utterance. At this point, Jenkins mentions that the speakers fail to understand the flawed utterances despite the fact that there was contextual information available which should have helped clarify them. She notes that the speakers focus on decoding the language rather than using other communication strategies to find meaning. She continues by supplying two more examples where speakers fail to make use of contextual cues.

Jenkins then shifts the focus of her data to accommodation. She describes accommodation as speakers making their speech more similar to their interlocutors' for the purpose of communicative efficiency or because of their desire to be liked. Jenkins argues that with ILT accommodation changes slightly, where instead of speakers changing their speech to be more like each others, they change it to what they believe to be a more target-like pronunciation. She gives a couple of examples of this occurring in conversations between interlocutors of the same L1 and also between interlocutors of different L1s. Jenkins states that this accommodation reveals that learners are aware of the features of their own pronunciation and which aspects are liable to be unintelligible for interlocutors of other L1s. Therefore, she states, "learners need specific training to enable them to add to their phonological repertoires those features which are most important for intelligible pronunciation in EIL contexts" (p. 96).

From this foundation of empirical data, Jenkins itemizes what she calls the Lingua Franca Core. This is her syllabus of items which produce global errors in pronunciation, which she couples with non-core features, or items which only produce local errors and do not impede intelligibility. She concludes by promoting the development of accommodation skills through ILT practice, namely using ILT pair and group work. She then points out several issues regarding EIL and the development of her pronunciation syllabus, saying that it will likely prove controversial, that there is a lack of materials which incorporate NNS accents and that learner needs need to be taken into account. She expresses her desire to see the EIL case to be argued more widely and points out areas for further research.

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After reading this article I had several immediate reactions; however, I was cautious of the immediate nature of these reactions, Jenkins herself knew that this material would be controversial, so I took some time to reflect. Specifically, I picked up on the problematic issues that Jenkins herself identified at the conclusion of her article. Although I see some merit in establishing pronunciation standards for English internationally, I have a hard time accepting Jenkins' prescribed syllabus.

For example, the context in which this modified pronunciation syllabus would be taught seems ill-defined. In an EFL context, or when teaching English in an outer or expanding circle country to NNSs, the classroom would consist of learners with the same L1. This would make it difficult to practice EIL interactions in the way that Jenkins painted her vision of them happening via successful communication in the international arena. She mentions the use of video conferencing activities so learners can practice accommodation skills but these require technology and materials that may not be available in expanding circle countries that are still developing or simply undersupplied. If EIL were taught in an ESL context then the need for a modified pronunciation syllabus fails to materialize. When learners are in an inner circle country their interactions in English will mainly be with NSs and they will probably want to work towards aligning their pronunciation with the predominant pattern in their environment.

This led me to my next objection to Jenkins' pronunciation syllabus, which was taking into account what the learners want. What Jenkins is selling makes sense to me, as a NS and an academic in the field of TESOL, but I would say that most English language learners would have an aversion to her modified pronunciation. The fact that native English speaking teachers are in much higher demand abroad than non-native English speaking teachers demonstrates that learners want exposure to what they feel is the prestige variety of English. Not to say that these learners have a goal to sound like a native speaker of English (and I would advocate that they shouldn't), but they do see "standard" English as an acceptable model for pronunciation. Jenkins seemed to imply that English language teachers were teaching their native accents; I disagree, although that may occur as a side effect. I would rather argue that these teachers should spend class time raising accent awareness. I think learners would then be more accepting of the fact that their accent is an aspect of their identity and a signal of their ownership of the language.

My third reaction to Jenkins' article was her mentioning of the learners' lack of use of contextual information to find meaning in their interlocutors' flawed utterances. I would have gone a different direction than Jenkins did; where she saw this as support for focusing on teaching pronunciation I saw it as a lack of instruction in communication strategies. If we could expand the learners' repertoire of tools for finding mutual intelligibility beyond decoding flawed pronunciations then we should do it. Teaching learners how to use context to find meaning seems like a much easier and more beneficial way to increase language comprehension than developing and implementing an internationally recognized lingua franca core.

Lastly I would like to point out that yes, statistics show that the number of NNSs of English has grown beyond the number of NSs but that doesn't mean that NSs are a small minority. There are still hundreds of millions of native speakers of English who are prevalent in the international arena and who often interact with NNSs. In Jenkins' model, these NSs will not have had the experience of learning the modified pronunciation and accommodation strategies which could lead to difficulties in intelligibility when interacting with an English language user who was trained to interact with another NNSs.

Overall, I think that the need that Jenkins cites is valid, that there are more NNS-NNS interactions and therefore English language teaching shouldn't be geared towards NS comprehensibility. I also agree that if something isn't done, there is a risk of world Englishes becoming so different due to the variety of pronunciation that they become mutually unintelligible. And I would also agree that trying to teach a learner to sound like a native speaker is silly and shouldn't happen. However, I can't subscribe to the Jenkins' pronunciation syllabus due to the issues I mentioned above.