

English as a language for international communication

- International phonological targets and intelligibility –

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I. Introduction

In recent years, the demographic of bilinguals or English learners have increased dramatically and it is estimated that the number of non-native English speakers today is more than a billion, on the other hand, the number of native speakers is approximately 380 million (Clyne, 2008). Besides, the purpose of studying English has differed from it which was so in the past. People use English on a global scale such as international business settings, gathering worldwide information, studying in overseas or traveling in the world and so on, they study English for using in the global settings and communicate with people who are from varieties of countries. Accordingly, English today is used as an international communication tool and it cannot be separated with effect of globalization (Clyne, 2008), and as it is mentioned above, more than half of English users are non-native speakers, in this sense, English can be said that it works as an international language for its significant number of non-native users (Jenkins,1998). Although, most ELT professionals or learners appear to believe that English belongs to native speakers and the only appropriate model of English uses come from British or American English (Cook, 1999), it seems to be a time that language educators should question about the stereotype which have been reigned since starting the ELT history and worked as barriers for learners when they study English language. Therefore, this paper will discuss English standards focus on the speaking skills in international communication.

This essay is divided into following main three parts: English as an international language, phonological targets in EIL and teaching English (speaking) as an international language in classroom. In the first part, I will examine the role of English as an international language and need of intelligibility in the international communication, in the next part discuss difficulty of setting the international English norms, one possible suggestion for the international phonological norm and challenges to the intelligibility phonological skills and in the last part, I will talk about importance of students' awareness towards varieties of English and propose following two class activities, 'pronunciation R & L' and 'nuclear stress'.

II. English as an international language

A) The role of English as an international language

McKay (2002) proposes that English as an international language (EIL) is English which is used for international communication between countries and local communities and it also works as a language of a communication tool in multilingual societies (cited in Clyne, 2008; Matsuda, 2011). In the other words, EIL is a term that describes a function that uses for cross-cultural communication (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Clyne, 2008). Students learn English to communicate with people who are from different countries, societies and culture in EIL. This means, communications between English users involve different linguistic background such as grammar, accent and pronunciation, and in this sense, it can be said that there are varieties of Englishes in the world (Matsuda, 2011). For example, in my university in Australia, there are significant students of various races and I seldom interact with Australian students who are called native speakers. I usually communicate with Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Saudi Arabian, Indian, Iranian, and Serbian etc. and each of these people's Englishes have different phonological and grammatical characteristics. English is currently used more with non-native speakers than native speakers (Timmis, 2002) and learners predict that English is kept being used in interaction between non-native speakers in their future (Hewings, 2000).

Accordingly, English today is used mainly for communication between non-native speakers worldwide and people who are called native speakers are now not majorities among English users (Clyne, 2008). This fact suggests that the classroom in ELT no longer should focus the English teaching on the communication between native speakers and learners whose study English as an additional language, and should have question about making a target that sound like a native pronunciation, intonation or accent (Jenkins, 1998). Native speakers' English is no longer the norm that determines how English is being used (Clyne, 2008) and the main focus of ELT should be set on more realistic English used situations in EIL.

B) Need of intelligibility in the international communication

In the teaching English as an international language, the matter which should be considered is whether learners' communication is intelligible or comprehensible to their interlocutors (Sifakis, 2004) rather than whether the English which is spoken by learners is sounds like native speakers or not. Besides, Matuda (2011) argues that communication is a two-way road, therefore, conveying one's own message and trying

to perceive the message is not only non-native speakers' responsibility but also native speakers' (responsibility). The important point in speaking English in EIL is how English users succeed their communication with other English users, therefore, it is both, native and non-native speakers, responsibilities to try to understand their conversation and make the message intelligible so that they can communicate successfully. In this sense, Jenkins (2000, cited in Hewings, 2000) argues that "Varieties of English should no longer provide the norms against which the 'correctness' of pronunciation" (p.327) and what ELT educators should be considered is which features of phonological skills (pronunciation, accent and word stress etc.) are crucial to ensure intelligibility in communication between English users. English discourse standards are no longer possess native speakers and it should be reviewed in terms of intelligible discourse for non-native speakers.

III. Phonological norms in EIL

A) Difficulty of setting the international English norms

Accordingly, in EIL, English is used mostly between non-native speakers and the phonological targets should no longer concentrate on native speaker models and the aim should be set focus on intelligibility which enables students to interact successfully in EIL. However, if we set the phonological targets just concentrate on intelligibility, how students learn phonological skills without certain standard? Sifakis (2004) claims that variability and multiplicity English uses in the international communication between different non-native speakers make codify English phonological norms difficult. As above mentioned, there are considerable English users worldwide today, and each of these English is constructed influenced by their each first languages or backgrounds. In the other words, each of English spoken by non-native speakers has different phonological characteristics. Therefore, it seems to be unrealistic to make norms which are fitted all those English phonologically and this lack of clear alternatives of phonological standards would cause some problems to students.

Besides, although setting native speakers be phonological targets or models in EIL seems to be meaningless, abandoning the native speaker models totally from ELT classroom is unrealistic, because the model has been penetrated to students and teachers' mind, and it is true that there are English users who want to be native like speakers (Cook, 1999). Timmis (2002) suggests that some learners consider that native speaker pronunciation is a standard and it is a kind of symbol of high level of English achievement for students and it works as a learners' motivation or an ideal target.

However, making this goal is impractical and most English users regard themselves as a failure who cannot reach the native speaker target (Cook, 1999) and some of learners appear to give up English learning because they cannot attain the goal of sound like native speakers (Keys & Walker, 2002).

Thus, setting the phonological norm which is suitable for EIL seems to be significantly problematic and setting native speakers be phonological norms cannot be said it is totally pointless because it gives learners certain rules of English phonology and there are students who want to make their target for native speakers, or anticipate using English with native speakers mainly in the future. In this sense, native speaker norms should not be limited and ELT educators need to consider international English norms carefully (Timmis, 2002).

B) One possible suggestion for international phonological norm

Although there are several arguments towards English norms, one of the most appropriate norms seems to be the one which Jenkins suggested in 1998. She proposes that phonological skills which should be set as a model in EIL are one which enables English learners to communicate with wide varieties of people. In this sense, the discourse which is uttered in EIL should consist of “simplified, neutral, universal pronunciation variety, intelligible and acceptable to both native and non-native users of English” (p.120).

Jenkins (1998) proposes that there are two main elements, segmental and suprasegmental, that ensure intelligible discourse in order to interact successfully in EIL. Regarding segmental system, she suggests that following three points are essential, certain segmentals, nuclear stress (the main stress in a word group), and the effective use of articulatory setting. According to her study, English words have ‘core’ sounds which should not be derived from native speaker models for successful communication, and deviation of ‘core’ sounds from native models cause misunderstandings or failure of interaction. For example, she suggests that replacement of pronunciation of /ð/ and /θ/ with other sound /t/ or /d/, do not usually cause interaction problems (Jenkins, 2000, cited in Hewings, 2000), therefore, the sounds /ð/ or /θ/ are regarded as not ‘core’ sounds. Besides, consonant deletion also plays important roles in intelligible interactions, for example ‘textbook’ is pronounced /teksbuk/ the middle of three consonants is not pronounced. However, non-native speakers tend to delete consonant sounds differently from each other due to the influence of their first language and it makes their interaction difficult in EIL. Furthermore, accuracy of ‘unclear stress’ is vital for English users, because misplacement of nuclear stress will cause

misunderstandings of EIL communication (Jenkins, 1998). For example, 'This is my dog', the most usual position for nuclear stress is on 'dog', while if speaker set the stress on 'this', some other meaning would be established, such as 'another dogs are not mine'. And another important element in EIL that Jenkins suggests is 'articulatory setting', which is skills that enable learners to manipulate the production of core sounds and unclear stress, for example, voice quality, volume and speed of utterance and so on.

Thus, students should recognize which sounds are the 'core' sounds and which consonants should be deleted to produce words sounds intelligibly, and get knowledge how dose stress play important role in their English speaking through classroom activities. Actually, Jenkins (1998) suggests that the suprasegmental system (stress, rhythm and intonation) plays more essential for intelligible interaction, it is however more difficult to learn than the segmental system. Therefore, in classroom, students should learn discourse skills focus on the segmental system and regarding the suprasegmental skills, which is recommended acquiring through real interaction exposing to varieties of English. Besides, students should regarded this rules as the more realistic, rather than the more ideal, and focus on these realistic aspects of phonology, rather than imitate native speakers' phonological discourse (Timmis, 2002) and encourage themselves to choose the discourse skills which are helpful to resolve phonological problems in ELT communication and learnable for them.

C) Challenges to the intelligibility phonological skills

The Jenkins suggestion of international norms seems to be realistic and appropriate for learners in EIL, however, there are some researchers who argue against Jenkins's notion. I mentioned above, it is actual that there are considerable students who want to learn English which is spoken in a native speaker way and Misono (2009) suggests that how learner can predict whether they will use English in EIL or EFL/ ESL and it is unnatural to make a sort of constraint on natural language. For example, Jenkins's suggestion regarding 'core' sounds, learner could replace the sounds of /ð/ and /θ/ with sounds of /t/ or /d/ in ELT pronunciation, however, for users whose first language have these sounds, replacing these sound with other sounds is significantly unnatural. Besides this sounds modification result in producing approximate pronunciations and these word sounds would work as obstacles for successful communication (Misono, 2009).

Accordingly, there are several arguments towards the English phonological norms focused on intelligible communication in EIL, however, it seems to be undoubted that students should set their target towards international communication with mainly

non-native speakers and the native English models are no longer appropriate aims for English learners. Therefore, I will suggest a possible classroom teaching which encourage students realize varieties of English utterance and produce phonologically intelligible discourse.

IV. Teaching English (speaking) as an international language in classroom

A) Importance of students' awareness towards varieties of English

In the EIL classroom, what teachers have to do primarily for students is stimulating students' awareness at existence of varieties of English in the world. Learners should be encouraged to understand how different varieties of English exist in the world and how they are different phonologically (Kerkpatric, 2007). One of the ways that teachers make students be aware of it is expose students to as many different kinds of English as possible. Teacher can use not only the CDs which accompany the textbook but also supplemental materials such as audio, movies, news and media which are produced in different countries in phonologically different English, for example, if students study about famous people in the world, teacher can use the video or audio of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela rather than Abraham Lincoln or Hollywood stars. Besides, using only native-to-native speech in the classroom is meaningless for students who are expected to use English mainly between non-native speakers (Cook, 1999) and using as much varieties of English as possible provides students not only opportunities to understand varieties of English, but also confidence that their speaking English which is phonologically different from native or other non-native speakers is enough valuable and not inferior or deficit English, and also it leads students' awareness that "people who speak differently from some arbitrary group are not speaking better or worse, it is just differently" (Cook, 1999, p.149)

B) Pronunciation R and L

Infamously, it is widely known that Japanese people are difficult to pronounce English /ɹ/ and /l/, it is because the /ɹ/ and /l/ sounds are not differentiate as separate phonemes in the Japanese sounds system. Japanese learner cannot recognize these sounds difference and tend to assimilate these sounds into a single phonemic category as a flap sound (Lambacher, 1999). However in my experience, mastering the pronunciation of /ɹ/ and /l/ is incredibly important, and jumbling this two sounds or using the words which include /ɹ/ or /l/ sounds with improper /ɹ/ or /l/ sounds cause misunderstanding in ELT communication. For example, in my life in Australia, I am

reluctant to order 'blueberry muffin' in a café, because I have to say the word of 'blueberry' at least three times to make the shop keeper understand what I want. Besides, I cannot order a 'fruit loaf' successfully in bakery shop, even now. The shop keeper, both native and non-native, cannot understand my pronunciation of 'fruit', because my pronunciation of 'fruit' sound likes 'flute', my friend told me. Actually, I do not think the shop keeper thought that I ordered a 'flute' in the bakery shop, however, my pronunciation of 'fruit' works as an obstruction in my daily life. Accordingly, the sounds of /ɹ/ and /l/ seems to have very important role in English discourse and it can be say it is 'core' sounds (Jenkins,1998) for Japanese learners and I will suggests following activities to learn the sounds of /ɹ/ and /l/.

[Class details]

- English course (EIL) in public secondary school in Japan
- Year 8 (14 years old), 25 students, 50 minutes class duration
- Level: intermediate (study English for two years)
- The aim of the English course:

Students are encouraged to understand the language and culture and foster the attitude which enables them to communicate with other people actively. Besides, students are required developing practical communication ability by acquiring listening and speaking skills. (Ministry of Education, culture, sports, science and technology, Japan: English curriculum guidance record, 2011)

[Activity 1] Get word cards which can be put in the blank!

Procedure/

1. The teacher prepares five different kind of cards which are written sentences with blank for students' numbers (see appendix: 1).
2. Students get one cards and guess the missing words, and fill appropriate words in the blanks choosing from the vocabulary list. (Grammar and vocabulary activity)
3. If there is vocabulary which students do not know, the teacher instructs the meaning.
4. After students finish filling the blanks and making complete sentence, they practice pronunciation of vocabulary which is used in the cards. The teacher demonstrate pronunciation especially focus on /ɹ/ and /l/, and make students aware the difference.
5. Teacher provides another cards which are written a word to students (see appendix: 2) and the word cards of A are distributed to the students who have a

sentence card of A, and similarly the word cards of B are distributed to the students who have a sentence card of B (the rest cards is distributed in the same way).

6. Students with the cards of A, B, C, D, E are made into one group, and total five group are made.
7. Students start the game that they collect their missing word cards. For example, a student who have cards of A (student A) ask a student who have cards of B (student B) whether she/he has a card of 'Grass' or not, and if student B has a card of 'Grass', she/he gives the card to student A. Student A can ask only one students and even if the card which is given to student A is different from the word which student A want, student A has to receive the card. In the case of student A and B, there is a possibility that even student A ask 'Grass', students B gives her/him the card of 'Glass'. Students continue this in turns until they can collect all words which are put in the blanks.
8. After finish this activity, students show their each sentence cards to another students and correct all sentence cards' answers. Some students might put incorrect words in the blanks and get the improper word card.
9. In the last, one student from each groups read out their sentence, and if there are grammatical mistakes, the teacher gives correct answers to students and meanwhile, the teacher instructs students' pronunciation just in case the students' sound is significantly deviated from intelligible pronunciation.

In this activity, teacher should not focus on pronunciation correctness explicitly and encourage students to notice that there are sound difference between /ɹ/ and /l/, and how this difference effect words meaning and communication. As mentioned above, for Japanese learners, producing sounds of /ɹ/ and /l/ is very difficult and it can be say that producing the sounds of /ɹ/ and /l/ like native speakers are impossible for Japanese speaker, except returnee children. Therefore, teacher and students set a target to intelligible and recognizable pronunciation and trying to keep practice through classroom activities.

C) Nuclear stress

English is widely acknowledged that it is 'stress-timed rhythm' and the intonation and stress seem to affect intelligibility certainly. The English intonation and stress play important roles that explaining contents of the communication through contrast or highlighting. Besides, it is less difficult to learn the certain logic of stress

because generally the intonation phrase is used with the information part and the stress is put on the information focus (Wong, 2004). On the other hand, the distinguished feature of Japanese language is it has less intonation or stress in utterance. Therefore, I will propose one possible activity that encourages students to aware how stress or intonation plays a crucial role to convey their message correctly in their utterance.

[Activity: 2] Let's find the friends who did/ will do same thing as you!

Procedure/

1. The teacher gives students some questions as a pre-activity. For example, the teacher asks a student 'where did you buy this bag?', and the student answers 'I bought this bag in Korea'. Next, the teacher changes the question and asks same student 'what did you buy in Korea?', the student has to answer stressing on the word of 'bag' this time, such as I bought a bag in Korea. In this pre-activity, the teacher encourages students to stress a certain part and tries to make students aware how the appropriate part stress works in their oral communication.
2. The teacher provides cards (see appendix: 3) which are written three sentences to all students. There are six types of cards with different contents. And students have to look for another student who has the same card as them questioning about the events which are written on sentence cards. Besides, this game has rules that students have to question with what, where, which, when, and they have to answer in sentences. For example, student A who has a sentence card A ask student B who has a sentence card B,
A: Where will you go tomorrow?
B: I will go to school tomorrow.
A: Who will you go to school with?
B: I will go to school with Takashi and Yuko tomorrow.
At this point, student A knows that student B does not have same cards as student A. Therefore, student A moves to another student and try to find a student who has a same card as his/hers.
3. After students find another student who has an exactly same contents card, they make pairs with the student and question each other about events which are occurred yesterday and write down the friend's story (writing activity).
4. The teacher makes some students read out the story and ask some questions related to the story. The student answers the teachers question and if necessary, the teacher corrects the intonation or stress.

In this activity, students can recognize how stresses help efficient communication and how improper positions for stress make people confuse. Besides, this nuclear stress should be acquired through natural conversation, therefore in this activity, what the teacher has to do is focusing of stimulating students' awareness of roles of stress.

Conclusion

This paper examined how globalization has influenced learners' cognition towards English language itself, what are the non-native English users' needs in EIL and how ELT should response to the changes of English circumstance. The notion that English today is lingua franca and it no longer belongs to native speakers is seems to be prevailing among ELT scholars, and most of them recognize that students should set their English learning target for attaining the discourse skills which enable them to communicate with both non-native and native speakers, and as the same time, English learner should aim to acquire intelligible phonological skills rather than imitating native speaker standards. Although the Jenkins suggestion of international intelligible phonological norms seems to be epoch-making ideas and it is surely learnable for non-native learners, the approximate phonological discourse might cause erosion of English nature and result producing new English which no longer works as a lingua franca. Therefore, the important thing about international intelligibility primarily appears to be accepting non-native English variations and set a phonological target which is not only learnable and intelligible for both native and non-native speakers, but also not spoil English nature itself.

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[Appendix: 1] Sentence cards

[A]

Kazumi was born in Japan. Her village is in _____ area and there is a big _____. She likes to _____ a book on the _____ and eats a _____ muffin which her mother bakes.

Vocabulary: rural river read relax grass listen berry apple

[B]

Hiroshi is a big boy. He likes eating food very much. His favorite food is sushi _____, _____ and _____. He has a huge _____.

Vocabulary: fries drink rolls belly head fruit water plate

[C]

Akiko is a Buddhist, so she always _____ before eating food. And she never leaves boiled _____ and kills insects, even _____ or _____. She is a _____ Buddhist.

Vocabulary: smile flies prays real modern rice mammal lice

[D]

Shinichi likes playing a _____ and swimming. He is a _____ hander but when he _____ instruments, he usually uses his left hand. And his dream is to be a _____ who can play instruments.

Vocabulary: crew car plays touch collect right flute artist

[E]

Yoshiko bought a present for her grandmother. Her grandmother likes _____ blue and red, so she chose _____ with red _____ for her. She was very _____ to find good present.

Vocabulary: glasses hard light wallet frame chemicals glad nervous

[Appendix: 2] Word cards

[A]

Fruit	Play(s)	Light	Lice
Hard	Drink	Smile	Artist

[B]

Berry	Pray(s)	Flute	Glass(es)
Relax	Collect	Modern	

[C]

Read	Roll(s)	Crew	frame
Apple	Car	Head	wallet

[D]

Grass	Fry (Fries)	Rice	Glad
Listen	chemicals	Nervous	Water

[E]

River	Belly	Fly (Flies)	Right
Rural	Touch	Mammal	Plate

[Appendix: 3] Sentence cards

[A]

I will go to school with Takeo and Miho tomorrow.

I bought a yellow hat yesterday.

I read a book with blue cover day before yesterday.

[B]

I will go to school with Takashi and Yuko tomorrow.

I bought a blue hat yesterday.

I read a book with blue cover yesterday.

[C]

I will go to school with Takeo and Miho day after tomorrow.

I bought two yellow hats yesterday.

I read a book with green cover day before yesterday.

[D]

I went to school with Takeo and Miho yesterday.

I bought two blue hats three days ago.

I read a magazine with green cover yesterday.

[E]

I went to school with Takeo and Miho three days ago.

I bought a blue wallet day before yesterday.

I will read a magazine with green cover tomorrow.

[F]

I will go to school with Atsushi and Miho tomorrow.

I bought three blue wallets day before yesterday.

I will read a magazine with yellow cover tomorrow.