Pronunciation and GLLs

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The first thing that is needed by the GLL who wants to learn good pronunciation is – a good pronunciation teacher. This may sound like a tautology, but perhaps more than for other areas of language learning, such as vocabulary, spelling, and grammar, good pronunciation is a skill that is best learned under a teacher who both sounds like a native in the target language, and who also possesses the specialized skills needed to help others acquire accurate pronunciation. Feedback on what you're doing right and not so right is particularly important in pronunciation. Without it, it can be difficult to really get the finer points of articulation, using only written texts, audio recordings, and videos.

In the real world, however, a learner will often be studying under a teacher who may or may not be a native speaker of the target language, but who in either case may not have much specialized training in phonetics or pronunciation, and who is thus only able to offer fairly general kinds of help and feedback to the student. Sometimes a non-native teacher can explain pronunciation rules, such as that of English compound noun stress, but she (for the sake of simplicity, we will use feminine pronouns when referring to a teacher or a listener, and masculine ones when referring to a student or speaker) doesn't apply the rule in her own speech, thus exposing her students to a relatively faulty model. Where either of these situations applies, the student will mostly have to take matters of pronunciation into his own hands.

Over the years, there have been many approaches to teaching pronunciation; see Celce-Murcia et al 1996:2-11 for a clear and informative overview. This chapter, rather than trying to reproduce and evaluate a history or survey of pronunciation teaching techniques and fashions, aims to concentrate in a practical way on what the writer feels are some of the key issues in pronunciation learning, collected over fifteen years of teaching English oral and listening skills at a major Asian university. We will focus on the possibilities open to a student who wants to learn to sound like a native speaker in the target language, but doesn't necessarily have a teacher with either a lot of phonetics and pronunciation-specific expertise, or nativelike pronunciation, to guide him. We will use English as our example target language, but the principles discussed can be applied to any language.

1. Pronunciation, intelligence and laziness

Before beginning serious work on pronunciation, the student must first be convinced that pronunciation is something worth working on. It is easy to take the attitude, "What difference does pronunciation make, as long as I'm understood?" Dealing with this will require some mental gymnastics (Celce-Murcia et al 1996:19, 29). In some cultures and environments, students may fear that having pronunciation that sounds "too good" can sound like showing off or may be in some other way antisocial. Stevick (1991:116) calls this "the interpersonal and intrapersonal price of success in pronunciation." So a student may choose to try to sound minimally understandable to

others in a way that follows local conventions, rather than trying to sound really nativelike. Quite a few teachers also take this approach. The writer favors the second option, that is, learning to sound as much like a native speaker as possible. We will consider each approach below.

The first approach does not aim for perfection, considering it too ambitious and perhaps even unattainable a goal for most learners. The learner works at developing a pronunciation style that is clear and understandable to both native and non-native speakers, but not necessarily nativelike (Abercrombie 1991:93). Vowels may have slightly different values; for example, all occurrences of [i] and [ɪ] may be pronounced [i], and some substitutions may be used, such as [d] for [ð]. Learners adopting this approach may also be open to incorporating a mixture of features from different dialects of the target language; for example, someone learning what is basically North American pronunciation may use a British [ɑ] in words like *class* and *half*, or a British [ɒ] in words like *Tom* and *John*, perhaps influenced by the *o* in the orthography.

The second approach is the "100%" approach. The learner uses speakers of one dialectal variety of the target language as his primary model and tries to learn to speak exactly like that model without mixing in features from other dialects (Strevens 1991:97), or using convenient substitutions for certain sounds, e.g. [s] for [θ], or [l] for initial [ð], in the case of Taiwan learners.

Arnold Toynbee offers a strong argument for the second approach: "It is a paradoxical but profoundly true and important principle of life that the most likely way to reach a goal is to be aiming not at that goal itself but at some more ambitious goal beyond it." Even if perfection is not attained, you at least have a chance at it if you set your goals high; if you aim lower, you often end up not only with poorer results, but also with an attitude of "it's close enough – don't bug me", leading to an overall sloppiness that will affect everything in your learning.

Spoken language is a social act, and you are expected to fulfill many of the **listener's** expectations and needs (Tench 1981:17-20). The more of these that are violated, the harder it will be on the listener, and the more "points" will be taken off by listeners in their judgment of the speaker. Munro & Derwing (1995) have found that it takes more time for a native speaker of a language to process foreign accented sentences. Poor pronunciation may be compensated by very good, informative content; we may be willing to invest more effort into understanding a speaker if he is telling us something we think is especially important or interesting. But we can't or won't invest that kind of effort every time we strike up a conversation. We will be a bit less willing to put up with a lot of inconvenience if it is a purely casual exchange and it ends up consuming a lot of our mental resources.

Once the student sees good pronunciation as an others-centered skill rather than simply something to feed his own ego and take up extra practice time, working on pronunciation becomes a more meaningful and even slightly noble undertaking. Awareness of the following can help push a student toward trying his best to learn good pronunciation:

(1) You tire others out needlessly when your pronunciation isn't clear, and next time they will be less likely to want to speak with you; thus poor pronunciation inconveniences others and affects your social life. As a comparison, imagine talking with an older speaker of your native language who has a very strong regional accent, or who maybe is not wearing his dentures, and is difficult to understand. Though you may be able follow what he says, it will be taxing and tiring. The teacher can play to her students a tape of such speech, if available, to further drive home the point. The

many benefits of good pronunciation, on the other hand, will come back to the speaker very quickly in the form of social rewards.

(2) Others are likely to underestimate your abilities (Rodríguez 2002) or consider you less **intelligent** if your pronunciation is not very accurate. Beebe (1988:273) reports that native speakers may find foreign pronunciations "comical," "cute," "incompetent," "not serious," or "childish". Some of the writer's students have said they thought that poor pronunciation would just make others view them as lazy, and they said they didn't particularly mind this; the idea of being considered less intelligent, however, shocked many of them into action.

(3) People will vest more **trust** in others who speak more like them, including in word and sentence pattern choice, and in pronunciation. This will obviously have far-reaching effects, beyond just on one's social life.

2. Respect for mistakes and using listener feedback

Mistakes can play different roles in social interactions. Usually they are associated with embarrassment or even shame, though they are often the basis of lots of funny stories and can bring hilarity as well. Language mistakes, regardless of whether they are errors of word choice, grammar, or pronunciation, can also be embarrassing for the speaker and even the listener. But in a language learning context, mistakes are **treasures**; they are keys to improvement, if identified, analyzed, and used as the basis for gaining new understanding and forming a new habit.

If a student is lucky, his listener will give him various kinds of feedback on all aspects of his speech production: content, grammar, word choice and also pronunciation. A language learner who is sensitive and attuned to this feedback can use every speech transaction as a "language lesson on the fly". Humans are programmed to be highly sensitive to reactions in others such as blinking or a quizzical look. Language learners, however, are often so preoccupied with their own production that they may miss opportunities offered by this kind of feedback. In fact it is likely that they do catch much of it, but since it may be interpreted as a negative response to one's linguistic performance, the speaker may block it out so as to avoid getting discouraged, and to help keep up his rhythm and motivation to keep trying. This in itself is not bad – it's one example of the "thick skin" strategy that helps beginners actually attempt to speak a new language. But there is potential benefit to be reaped from all listener feedback, if one has a strategy prepared.

Some people will listen carefully when speaking with a foreigner, and when the speaker has made a grammar mistake or expressed something awkwardly, they will repeat the sentence as a native speaker would have said it. This is like a gift, generously offered, if the listener is not too flustered or distracted to recognize and accept it. Language learners are lucky indeed when they run into this kind of interlocutor. To benefit from the "gifts", though, the speaker must not only pay attention to just how the listener reframes the speaker's sentences, the speaker must also take notes in his mental notebook so he can remember the correction for the future. Most listeners will probably not give such rich and complete feedback; however, almost every listener, intentionally or otherwise, will give some kind of feedback, and almost all of it is potentially useful to the language learner. We will consider some of the other possible types of feedback and what the listener can do with them.

A listener may briefly knit her brow in a look of puzzlement. If the listener is trying hard to be polite, there will probably be fewer overt responses like this; if she is a bit impatient and unused to speaking with foreigners, she may impatiently contract her mouth muscles or squint her eyes to show she doesn't quite understand. A very impatient listener will be harder to deal with, but still, wherever the strongest feedback appears, the speaker will know he has said something somehow unusual or incorrect. Just watching the brow of a more empathetic listener can usually pinpoint areas where there is some kind of problem. If the speaker is willing to interrupt the flow of discourse, he may consider asking the listener how to say a particular sentence more correctly. If not, he can look it up after he's home, or ask another English speaker. On the other hand, the speaker can instinctively feel that he is doing well when the conversation flows smoothly, there is lots of smiling and eye contact, and the little muscle contractions, cocking of the head, and eye squinting don't occur very much. In short, listener feedback is an extremely valuable source of guidance on what one is doing right and not quite right, and the GLL will cultivate his ability to observe and collect listener responses to his speech performance every opportunity that comes by.

3. Dealing with specific pronunciation problems: Some key examples

Some, but not all, pronunciation mistakes are due to interference from the mother tongue (Celce-Murcia et al 1996:28). Sometimes the target language has a sound that the native language does not, and this makes the sound more difficult to master. If this is the case, articulatory descriptions and model demonstrations can be very helpful. As an example, French, German and many other languages don't have the [θ] sound, but it is fairly easy either to describe – Strevens (1991:101) calls this the "practical phonetics" method – or to teach and learn through demonstration, the "exhortation" method. Isolated production of a sound is usually not that difficult. Making a habit of incorporating the correct sound into one's everyday speech presents a much bigger hurdle.

When the target sound is absent from the student's native language, it can sometimes be found in another variety of the native language. The student will certainly have heard this variety in the media or elsewhere, and this can be exploited in language learning. [θ] is not used in most varieties of Latin American Spanish, but it is in Iberian Spanish. When this is pointed out to Spanish-speaking students from Latin America, it should make it easier to learn the English [θ]. [ð] can be built upon this sound by adding voicing.

It is also possible that an unfamiliar sound is in fact used under special circumstances in the native language. Standard Mandarin has a long [i] but not a short [ɪ]. However, short [ɪ] does occur in military commands. The Mandarin word for "one" is [i], but it is pronounced [ɪ] in the march command, 'Hup, two, three, four!' Finding equivalent sounds in odd places in the native language is one path to more accurate pronunciation in the target language.

In the writer's opinion and experience, the benefits of having students relate sounds in the target language to similar ones in their native language far outweigh any possible drawbacks (Abercrombie 1991:94). Many sounds will tend to be nearly identical in any two languages, and thus present a zero-learning load (Strevens 1991:99). When two sounds are not exactly the same, the small details that distinguish

the two can be worked on once the student is close. Correct mapping of the most appropriate sound in the native language to that in the target language is of course essential. An example of incorrect mapping in the case of Taiwan English is the matching of [ʌ] to the Mandarin sound [a] by many books, apparently due to the previous use in Taiwan of standard British English as the standard for English teaching. This mapping was not changed after General American became the new standard in the early 60s. This has resulted in confusion between words like *cup* and *cop*, *color* and *collar*. There is a closer equivalent of [ʌ] in Mandarin (the *e* in words like *zheng*[4] 'straight'), but books generally fail to point this out. It is up to the teacher, and the alert student, to discover the best correspondences.

One odd thing in the writer's experience: sometimes a nearly perfect equivalent exists in the native language for a sound that students often have trouble with in the target language, due to previous faulty teaching. One such case is the sound [eɪ] as in *take*, which is often pronounced [tæk] in the ESL variety common in Taiwan. If students are told to simply make the Mandarin [eɪ] when pronouncing *take*, they keep trying to "Anglicize" [eɪ] to the version they're more familiar with, in the process producing the wrong sound, either [ɛ] or [æ]. Many students seem to find it difficult to suddenly switch to a "Chinese" sound in the middle of an English word, even though the results are excellent when they manage to do it. They tend to find it [strɛndʒ] and laugh. This is an example of the effects of reinforced faulty models. It shows that students in fact learn some of their lessons extremely well and hold on to them tenaciously – it's just unfortunate it is sometimes a wrong sound that is taught so successfully. Such errors can however be fixed, with effort, and the most motivated learners do succeed.

Another area of pronunciation difficult to correct is that of **relative length**. This can be dealt with through a combination of targeted practice and cognitive understanding of rules such as "A vowel occurring before a voiced sound will be lengthened" (e.g. *bat* vs. *bad*). Lengthened vowels can also be noted in text mark-up (described below).

Some students have a tendency to read each syllable with equal length. It's often not so much a problem of making stressed syllables long enough, but of making unstressed ones short enough (Chela-Flores 2001:90). For help in picking up English stress timing, students can use an arm to make circles in which each stressed syllable coincides with the arm being at the lowest point of the circle. The circles sometimes have to be made more quickly or slowly depending on the length and prosodic structure of the phrase; but the continuous motion can help redistribute varying syllable lengths more in accord with native speaker rhythmic patterns. This falls under what Acton (1991:126) describes as a "connection between certain non-verbal behaviours (such as speech-rhythm-related upper-body movement) and suprasegmentals."

Jazz chants, such as those by Carolyn Graham, can also help. These belong to what Strevens (1991:100) calls the "speech training" method, in which special games and exercises are constructed to practice particular sounds, rhythms and so forth. Once the student gets the idea of how English rhythm works in a more exaggerated and stylized form, he can start paying closer attention to how these rhythm patterns occur in the everyday conversation of native speakers.

Another important feature for students to keep in mind is the linking of the final sound of one word or syllable to the beginning sound of the next word or syllable if it starts with a vowel. Conversely, linking should not take place between most

consonants. In typical Taiwan English, to give an example, linking rules are just the opposite of standard English: students tend to pronounce a word-initial vowel whether it is utterance-initial or not with a glottal stop, instead of linking the preceding sound to it; two examples are *is it* and *am I*, which are usually pronounced [ʔɪz ʔɪt] and [ʔæm ʔaɪ] in Taiwan English instead of [ʔɪzɪt] and [ʔæmaɪ]. At the same time, students tend to elide a syllable-final consonant, especially /-t/ or /-d/, into the next sound when it is consonantal, so *basketball* is pronounced [ˈbæskəbɔl], *notebook* as [noʊbʊk], with no period of silence for the "hold" phase of the /t/ stop (which may in fact be realized as a glottal stop by native speakers). This may happen as well with speakers of other languages, such as Spanish. Students are often surprised that this pause is required, first, since they think they are faithfully imitating movie actors by speaking fast and smoothly and taking their own clever shortcuts; and second, because this is the model they have received from their teachers. Specifically teaching the difference between stops (/p, t, k, b, d, g/ plus the non-phonemic glottal stop /ʔ/) and continuants (like /m/ and /z/) can help students remember where to patiently stop and pause for a while and where to keep going. A catchphrase that can be used to point this out is "Stop at stops!" It has become a sort of class slogan and inside joke among the writer's pronunciation students.

Sometimes an allophonic process from the native language, one the students are not even themselves aware of, is inappropriately carried over and applied to the target language. Making the students aware of this, especially if the teacher can point out the source of the habit in the native language, can be a relatively efficient way to correct systematic pronunciation errors.

An example carried over from Mandarin Chinese is the dropping of /-n/ in Vowel + /-n/ word finals, as in *one* and *nine*, especially when they occur before syllables or words starting with approximants like /j/ and /w/, leaving a bare nasalized vowel, with no contact between the tongue tip and the alveolar ridge. So *nine years* is typically pronounced [nãɪ̃jɪrz] by Taiwan students. A native speaker will certainly hear a foreign "accent", but may not be able to put her finger on just what is wrong. Parish (1991:110) reaffirms the usefulness of contrastive information in pronunciation correction: "An understanding of the approximations of substitutions offered by a student of a given language background – as 'specified' by the phonological habits of that language – will often provide the teacher with attack strategies, with ideas about what kind of partial and interim procedures will lead the student to the desired sound."

Demonstrations and reminders of what to do with the tongue tip seem in this case to help, as does paying extra attention to the letter *n* in the orthography, but this particular habit is so deeply ingrained from the students' native language – though almost nobody is in the least aware of it – that it is difficult to get them to remember it every time an English postvocalic /-n/ comes by. Students may need fairly frequent reminders.

Word stress is another major pronunciation problem. Students often are simply not in the habit of looking up and committing to memory the stress pattern of each new word they learn, or of rechecking that of familiar words; and they may also have been exposed to years of faulty models. Students need to be made aware of the importance of lexical stress. A word or utterance is often simply incomprehensible to the average English speaker when the stress is on the wrong syllable. An example: *Tennessee* was heard when a student meant to say *tendency*.

Lexical stress training can be combined with teaching compound stress (*in'surance salesman* vs. *in'surance 'salesman*) and phrase stress (*a 'great i'dea* vs. *a 'great idea* when no contrast is implied), another problem area for many students. Though Taiwan students, for example, will generally admit to having heard the rule before, every class in the writer's fifteen years of university teaching in Taiwan found the whole notion quite novel. All classes have needed to relearn the rule and practice examples of it intensively before finally beginning to incorporate it into their own speech. This seems to be clear evidence that the majority of the students' teachers did not follow this rule in their own speech; and the writer's acquaintance with numerous secondary school English teachers confirms this observation. The conclusion: A teacher must **do**, and not just **say**, what she wants the students to do. As Parish (1991:105) puts it: the teacher should "not speak one way when the specific exercise is in progress and a different way when s/he is casual or relaxes" and she must be "always be aware of being a teacher, consistent and attentive."

Tonic stress, or giving the most prominent stress to the final stressed syllable in a phrase, clause, or sentence, is another important concept to introduce. Since many books do not explain the role of tonic stress (indicated by an asterisk *) in the context of phrase and compound stress, the rules are given below:

(1) Phrase stress: In Adjective + Noun expressions, all elements retain their original lexical stress: BEAUtiful *DAY, RED ba*LOON, LOUD *SINGing.

(2) Compound stress:

(2a) In Noun + Noun compounds, the modified noun is destressed: *BOOKcase, *WHEAT field, *EYE lash, regardless of whether the words are written separately or as a single word.

(2b) If the modifying noun of a Noun + Noun expression is a key material or ingredient: BEEF *STEW, CLAY *POT, MEtal *TAG; or if it is some kind of location: KItchen *SINK, DIning room *TAble, CIty *HALL, the modified noun in the expression retains its original lexical stress as in the Adjective + Noun expressions described in **(1)**.

(2c) Adjective + Noun expressions which have become lexified are compounds, and are treated the same as Noun + Noun compounds as in (2a); e.g. *GREENhouse, *BIG shot, *HIGHball.

Students can be given quizzes in which they must circle the stressed syllables, and also mark the tonic syllable with an * – otherwise they tend to forget to begin the tonic syllable on a higher pitch. (It is because of tonic stress that *brick* in *BRICK *WALL* may seem to be unstressed, compared with *wall*.) In stress quizzes, students may divide syllables according to how they sound rather than according to morphological divisions or dictionary syllabification conventions, e.g. *a TTRACT* rather than *at TRACT* is acceptable for this kind of quiz.

In this process, students must also develop a concept of the "syllable", something many start out having problems with. A student may say a word with either too few or too many syllables, thus confusing the listener; for example, if the speaker drops a syllable, the listener may hear *boring* when *borrowing* was meant; and the listener may be puzzled when an extra syllable is added and the speaker says [dʒu 'i si] instead ['dʒu si] *juicy* – in this case, the orthography seems to be the source of the problem. Word, phrase, and compound stress quizzes also offer the opportunity to point out words with fewer syllables than expected due to schwa elision, such as *family, conference, camera* (2, not 3 syllables), and *vegetable* (3, not 4 syllables).

Teaching a few rules regarding stress shift in related words belonging to different parts of speech can help solve some recurring problems. One example is: do **not** stress

the final -ate syllable in verbs, even though -a- is stressed in nouns ending with -ation, e.g. *graduate-graduation*; *vibrate-vibration*. Many more such rules can be found in Teschner 2004.

4. Independent learning

A student often has limited hours in an English class that either attempts to teach all the language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking, or perhaps just one or two of these. Pronunciation may well be just an assumed part of the oral portion of the class, with little time devoted specifically to pronunciation skills per se, except to correct the more obvious errors. Also, some students may consciously or subconsciously assume that if there is anything they need to improve in their English, some teacher in some class will tell them about it at some point before graduation. The good learner, and not just the good language learner, will use his university or other academic setting as a springboard for his own learning projects, rather than being passive and overly dependent on the system. He can see beyond the notion that may be prevalent in some countries that things taught in the formal curriculum are the only ones that need to be learned; and that the main purpose of learning is to get good grades and pass entrance examinations to the next level of schooling. The GLL knows that he must often fend for himself in such matters as learning better pronunciation. The question is how to do so most effectively.

The first task is for the student to get information on what to work on and how. The most important tool will be a book or books, with tapes or CDs, that focus just on pronunciation. Some recommendations are given at the end of this chapter. Ideally, the content of the book should be taught by a well-trained teacher in a course the student is registered for – some students in the writer's experience have said they found it difficult to understand the textbook on their own, even with the tapes or CDs. But when the student is not enrolled in such a class, the next best solution is to find another qualified person to ask for help. A trained teacher is best, though sometimes an average educated native speaker or experienced non-native learner can give assistance. Many of the principles introduced in pronunciation texts, such as the connection between the schwa [ə] and unstressed syllables, are totally new to the learner, and may not have been reflected in the models provided by the student's previous teachers. So the relative strangeness of the material may make it difficult to learn and apply independently. Probably one of the most important skills of the GLL is to know when he doesn't quite get something, and then to go and get help from the right person.

Much, however, can be learned by attentive and sensitive mimicry; and explicit learning of rules can help with what isn't picked up by mere imitation. Strevens calls these two approaches "the Innocence Principle", that is, you mimic without necessarily having explicit understanding of the processes involved; and "the Sophistication Principle", which employs a more intellectualized approach drawing on technical phonetic knowledge. Strevens (1991:103) summarizes the roles of the two approaches in this way: "People…*can* learn good pronunciation…with greater effectiveness if the teaching to which they are exposed takes account both of the Principle of Innocence – that is, that most people learn most of the elements of pronunciation easily anyway – and of the rival Principle of Sophistication – that is, that for residual problems it pays to be as sophisticated as the learners can take." The writer strongly agrees with this conclusion.

5. Make learning a habit that's hard to kick

In language learning as in so many other skills learners often experience a long period of slow progress and frustration, after which they may make a resolution to really do something to advance their skills. The form in which this resolution is expressed is crucial. A typical – and often doomed – pattern is to throw oneself into the project, studying hard for many hours on end, and then experiencing burnout. The learner still **wants** to continue, but every time he thinks about all the time and energy involved, and especially when he remembers the burnout that crowned the whole process last time he tried, he is likely to decide he has other more important priorities and procrastinate his language learning/pronunciation improvement program.

The GLL knows that the key to overcoming this obstacle is (1) only plan to work for a very short period every day – a timer can help – but he must make sure he actually does do it every day; (2) he must find a time into which his pronunciation practice will fit into his daily schedule, both on work or school days and on days off. As Acton says (1991:121): "the most important learning and change must go on outside the class, not inside." When this time is will depend on the individual, for example, whether he is a morning or an evening person. Many find the best way to make time for an important goal is to get up a bit earlier than usual and do it first thing in the morning. That way, no matter what comes up, the pronunciation program will continue unbroken. Other learners may find nighttime best, after the others around them have gone to bed or are off doing things like reading or watching TV. The one important point is that there be a daily slot for study, at a time when one is not pressed by other matters, and when one is alert enough not to want to just go to sleep instead.

Other rituals that do not take too much time can be incorporated into one's daily routine without too much disruption. An example is reading one "Pronunciation Tip of the Day" online (see below).

Once the daily "English time" becomes an established habit, it will not be that easy to **not** study English every day – things just won't feel right. The GLL realizes how hard bad habits are to break – fortunately, good ones can be quite stubborn too!

6. Learning to listen

Sometimes language students will be heard repeating a spoken or recorded model before the last word of the model sentence or phrase is even finished. This is a sure sign that a student is not actually listening at all but reading or reciting. While there is some reinforcement value in repeating sentences aloud under any circumstances, this style of "listen and repeat" is almost useless in improving pronunciation. The reason is that the student will be using some previously learned form of pronunciation rather the model one in the recording, since the student simply has not heard the entire model being spoken. Whether repeating immediately after a model, or using the "echo method" (described below), the GLL knows that in order to make progress in pronunciation it is absolutely necessary to listen carefully and attentively to the entire model, making sure it is really finished, before attempting to imitate it orally.

The benefits of good listening extend far beyond just pronunciation practice. Attentive listening is necessary (1) to get the clearest version possible of the speech signal into one's brain; (2) to make oneself as alert as possible to useful feedback from the interlocutor; and, probably most important of all, (3) to establish positive rapport with the interlocutor, one that will usually be reciprocated and lead to even better

communication. Everyone wants the attention and respect of others, and the best way to get these is to give them freely to others as a matter of basic principle and habit.

The GLL respects and adheres to the classroom rule of "Only one person talks at a time; the person talking gets the full attention of everyone else in the class." This applies even when fellow classmates are reciting or performing; this is **not** a time to be practicing for one's own turn. The GLL listens carefully to every recitation and performance by each person in the class, because the corrections each student receives might well be ones the GLL himself needs. By collecting the corrections of others, GLLs save everybody's class time for more interesting things, and the same corrections don't need to be repeated over and over again on different students who failed to pay attention the first time around.

7. Building a new model of peer interaction

Many pronunciation problems can be traced at least partly back to reinforcement patterns from one's peers, which are often transmitted just below full conscious awareness of what is happening and the extent of their power.

Probably the most powerful peer models, especially in the case of many Asians, are those of **shyness** and **conformity**. Usually what is behind these is not just simple stage fright, but a reluctance to stand out in a crowd or to show off (Stevick 1991:113-4). Really motivated language learners, however, are able to conquer qualms like these and focus on a higher objective, that of improving their language skills in a serious way. Acton (1991:123), citing Guiora (1972), suggests that "An appropriate degree of permeability of language ego boundaries is crucial if the learner is to develop a clear sense of identity within the target culture."

In Taiwan, and perhaps elsewhere, it is fairly common for students to form study groups to divide up the burden of reading literary texts and doing other assignments. But regarding language skills, students may make the assumption that they need a native speaker if they want to practice conversation, and they will then often say they don't know any foreigners to practice with – and that is often the end of it. Some really dedicated language learners, on the other hand, will find peers who have the same goals as they do, and agree to speak English to each other, either all day, or for a certain amount of time every day. This is a "self-help" method in which you make the best of what you have rather than mourning that the best alternative is not easily available to you, then doing nothing. Though some faulty pronunciation patterns may be transmitted and reinforced, breaking the ice and talking more, when combined with conscious collection of mental audio files, will certainly help put students on the road to greater fluency and accuracy in their spoken English.

8. Keeping a pronunciation journal and tracking progress

It is a good idea for teachers to require all students to keep a journal of all pronunciation and grammar corrections made in oral and written class work, and then to ask for a summary of these corrections and notes at the end of the semester. The GLL reviews his pronunciation and grammar journal often, at least once a week. The same student tends to get corrected for the same problems over and over; reviewing the corrections received in class can be a shortcut to fixing the problem so further class time need not be spent on it. While this may sound like an unrealistic goal, some

students have, in the writer's experience, indeed followed this practice and improved more quickly than others who did not. The journal is also available as a reference and basis for further notes after the class is completed. Some of the writer's students have reported keeping and referring back to, or even expanding, their pronunciation and grammar journal for years after finishing the class in which they began it.

It is sometimes hard to know just how much one's pronunciation and overall speaking skills have improved, if at all. Seeing concrete improvement is a strong reward for past efforts and a motivator for continued ones in the present and future. To mark one's progress, the teacher can, at the beginning of the semester, require students to make a recording of themselves reading a given passage aloud on cassette tape, CD or other medium. This should be done in one go, without constantly going back to rerecord parts the student is dissatisfied with, though the student is encouraged to practice before beginning the recording. The students can be also be asked to write a one-page (with half line spacing) essay on their reactions to their recording. The recording can be replayed at the end of the semester or the school year, and the students can be asked to write another essay, on what they notice in their old pronunciation that they have fixed, and also things that they maybe haven't changed completely but are aware of and are working on.

Students can also record themselves during the semester, since they will generally be able to pick out errors when listening to the recording that they miss when trying to monitor their speech in real time. This is especially helpful for getting feedback on rhythm and prosody in general.

9. Choosing an internal model and the "echo method"

We all have an internal model that we use as a comparison for the grammar patterns, words and sounds we produce in our native language. If we say something like *a children*, the model speaks up and tells us that there is nothing comparable to what we just said in our mental database, and it should be corrected. If we by mistake say *lawyer* instead of *lower*, our internal voice will give us the right pronunciation and have us self-correct immediately.

Whether conscious of it or not, learners also develop an internal voice as their model for the new language. In theory, this model should be the teacher. If it is, and if the teacher has good pronunciation, the student will likely develop good pronunciation himself. If the teacher offers a faulty model, the student will probably pick it up and speak in a way similar to the teacher. If this faulty model is one that is typical of many ESL learners from the same country, culture or language group as the learner, it will be strongly reinforced by the learner's peers and the domestic outside world in general. In such a situation, it is almost inevitable that the learner will take this widely-reinforced model as the one for his personal internal voice, against which he matches his own pronunciation. He will also have stored memories of his own voice in his particular style of speaking English from previous occasions. Students learning North American English may pronounce a word like *water* with an aspirated /t/ instead of a voiced "tap" [ɾ] and think it sounds "normal", but if a native US speaker pronounces it just like they do, the students will usually laugh because it sounds out of place. This is clear proof that they can distinguish native and non-native pronunciations quite well in others, and that the internal voice they model their own pronunciation after is not that of a native speaker.

A student can make a conscious decision to change this pattern. He can choose, for example, a news broadcaster from any number of English news stations that broadcast over the Internet or perhaps over local radio or TV. A movie or television actor, or other public person, like a politician, is another potential internal model.

One very useful tool in the process of cultivating a new internal model is the "echo method", in which a student listens to a short model utterance being spoken, then he "listens" to it play again in his head. This mental repetition of what was heard forms the model for what he finally repeats out loud. When following this method, his pronunciation is generally much more accurate, since his brain has already fully and correctly internalized the utterance, much like a retinal afterimage. This method is useful in all kinds of learning situations, but especially in ones in which there is little formal pronunciation instruction. As Strevens (1991: 97-8) puts it, "Most learners will learn to produce most sound features of a foreign language with reasonable accuracy by mimicry alone, given the opportunity". The echo method enhances a student's natural ability for mimicry, and has in the writer's experience radically improved the pronunciation of several students who started off with seemingly "hopeless" problems.

When one has a live or recorded model, all the listener has to do is let his brain repeat what it has just heard, and then he repeats it himself out loud. The echo method is also effective, however, in the absence of any kind of physical auditory signal. It can be used to read a written text, or to formulate a new sentence. In the case of reading aloud, the steps for applying the echo method are:

(1) Call up the image and voice of the internal model.
(2) Read through the text silently, to parse the grammar correctly, understand the content, and note where the stresses, pauses, and rises and falls will occur.
(3) The preparation work being done, now imagine your internal model reading aloud the sentence you have just pre-read. Listen to her vowels, her resonant voice, her intonation – and most importantly, her prosodic features. Students can in this way avoid defaulting to the inaccurate local style of pronunciation. It will be hard to imagine Tom Cruise or Sharon Stone speaking with a heavy Portuguese or Korean accent – it would simply sound incongruous. The mental playback of the sentence will naturally sound correct and **native**.

For an original sentence formulated on one's own, you follow the same process, except instead of reading and parsing the written sentence beforehand, you first decide on your content and compose the sentence in your head. When you have worked out all the bugs you can, you then call up your internal model and imagine her saying it aloud. This method can often help catch grammar and word choice as well as pronunciation mistakes, because the student may find, for example, that he has trouble imagining Julia Roberts saying *I'm bringing an umbrella lest it should rain*. It sounds all right as a textbook sentence, but who has ever heard it on a blockbuster Hollywood actress? The student may then be able to revise it to something like: "It looks like rain – I guess I'd better bring an umbrella." with fairly accurate pronunciation.

10. Pre-reading and text mark-up

Reading anything "cold" is difficult even for a native speaker; reading a text beforehand enables the reader to get the stress, phrasing, and overall intonation right,

without having to backtrack. Text mark-up, a technique borrowed from broadcasting (Utterback:127-9), helps the reader remember and quickly apply the preparation he did during pre-reading. This includes marking content vs. function words as stressed; also remembering to stress new but not old information; and to stress contrasting elements (I want the *blue* one, not the *red* one) (Celce-Murcia et al 1996:176). Other things to prepare ahead of time include *s*'s pronounced as [z], compound nouns and phrasal verbs, tonic stresses, pauses, intonational rises and falls, and so on. Learning to **destress** and apply a low, flat, robotlike intonation to everything that is not a content word, new information, or contrasted information may be take some practice for students who have become accustomed to stressing almost every word in a sentence, but awareness is half the battle.

Though stress and intonation are generally not explicitly marked as such in English orthography, punctuation and occasionally italics and boldface type in fact give many clues as to how to chunk a sentence appropriately and read it with the correct intonation. A useful rule of thumb is to rise (actually, it is not a simple rise, but a rapid high, low, rise melody) just before punctuation marks such as commas and dashes, and to fall at periods and semi-colons. Additionally, when no punctuation is marked, students should remember to rise and pause for an appropriate length of time at the end of each phrase or constituent, e.g.: *At last* (pause)*, he became frightened* (short pause) *and desperately floundered* (short pause) *in all directions* (long pause). Watching for upcoming **conjunctions** can help mark some intonation groups. Many students are also not aware of the rise on parenthetical phrases meaning 'he/she said' and benefit from having it pointed out to them.

11. Limitless free English resources

Before the arrival of the Internet, it may have been difficult to find a variety of spoken English passages for listening practice. For those who did not live in an English-speaking country, typical English listening resources may have included language teaching tapes and videos, available at school or for purchase at a fairly high price; possibly an English radio station; and English TV shows or movies on network TV, cable, or for rent from a video store. But the subject matter may have been limited and a learner would have to go to considerable lengths or expense to access these fragmented resources.

The Internet now offers one-stop shopping for English listening resources, most of which are free. The Internet seems to have at least a bit of just about everything the world at large has, with the only limits being the student's own motivation and resourcefulness. It is, however, very easy to get stuck in a routine of using the Net for the relatively few functions one has by chance learned about and finds useful or entertaining. Many more files that one could really benefit from are there; the problem is how to find ones appropriate to one's level, needs and interests. You can find just about anything with Google, but one is still left with the problem of knowing what to look for, and coming up with the right key words to find it.

The BBC, NPR, and other quality radio and news sites are good places to start; radio and TV portals are another place to look. There are numerous ready-made lists of resources on the Net, for example, on ESL teaching sites. The GLL will pay attention to all sorts of things in his environment that would be good for English practice, such as interesting current events, reports of advances in science and technology, social issues, sports, and entertainment news, for example. The GLL will

focus on materials that are inherently interesting to him; choosing just anything as long as it is in English will quickly lead to boredom and demotivation.

Some students may try listening to English radio or TV and find they are not really making much progress – they seem stuck in a bottleneck of understanding maybe only about 40 percent of what is going on. Rather than **extensive** listening, they may be better advised to try **intensive** listening, in which they choose a program they like, and then concentrate on a very short passage from that program. It should be played over and over until the whole clip is fully or mostly understood. This will do a lot more for listening ability that sheer quantity. And once the student is thoroughly familiar with the content, he can use the passage for "listen and repeat" or "echo method" practice to improve his pronunciation. This usually ends up being a significantly better investment of study time, with much more solid and satisfying results, than just listening to a constant stream of sound.

Work like this also tends to build up the student's store of mental sound files that can be retrieved for comparison when speaking English. When the student wants to express an idea similar to something said in these mental sound files, the right sentence will likely come to him very naturally. Conversely, if the student composes a sentence that is not grammatical or very colloquial, these stored mental sound files will often play themselves back in the student's head automatically, and the student will be able to know right off that something in his sentences need fixing.

12. Interpretation: Reading and speaking expressively.

Students who have a good handle on vowels and consonants and basic intonation can start working more on making their reading and speaking sound livelier. This is not to say that they should not try to sound interesting before this point, but if too much effort is put into trying to read expressively before the pronunciation basics are in place, such practice is likely to reinforce bad habits. Expressiveness in reading is more like the icing that should not be added until after the cake is fully baked. This is more of an issue for reading than speaking, since appropriate emotions tend to emerge naturally from spoken interaction between people.

Learners who tend to sound a bit flat and uninteresting when reading a written text aloud can consciously draw on their inborn acting skills and try to express emotions appropriate to the passage they are reading. This is something they probably do quite well in their own language; so it may help to have them imagine how they would express the passage in question in their native language, then to have them apply something similar to the way they read English. Exposure and **active** listening to lots of good models of spoken English helps build a good foundation for expressive reading aloud. Students often are carrying a lot more of these models around in their heads than they realize. Once they're aware of this personal resource, they can call on it and put it to good use.

Conclusion

Good pronunciation of a language is important first and foremost to achieve high intelligibility. But it goes much further than that. A student with good pronunciation will be perceived as more intelligent, more trustworthy, more a part of the group that speaks the target language. He will get more positive feedback from his listeners, and

this fosters more confidence, and generally increases his interest and motivation to learn the target language even better. Someone with poor pronunciation will only be understood through a process of patience and good will on the part of the listener, thus putting control of the transaction mainly in the hands of the listener, not the speaker. These are only a few of the many reasons why it is important for a student to empower himself with good pronunciation.

A student may get a teacher who herself has good pronunciation, or he may not. He may get a native or non-native teacher with a strong phonetics background and who is good at helping students pinpoint and fix pronunciation problems, or he may not. Whatever the particular variables are, it is the student who must live with the results. For this reason it is important that he realize that he must take matters into his own hands and be responsible for his own education. When a student has a teacher who is particularly good at something, the student needs the judgment to realize this and to make the most of it. If the teacher happens to be weak in certain areas, the student also needs the judgment to be able to see this, and then to seek help elsewhere to supplement what is lacking. This is of course not restricted to pronunciation, but applies to all aspects of the learning of all subjects, as well as all the other things one picks up at school that are not in the syllabus or textbook, such as character, conscientiousness, and empathy.

Once a student has a questioning attitude, rather than one of automatic acceptance of anything offered to him in a curriculum, he can begin to make his own judgments and choices. In the case of pronunciation, that involves comparing what he hears in the classroom with what he hears from native speakers he may happen to know, or ones in recordings or films. This may be a lot to expect of a relative beginner. But only if teachers help foster this kind of questioning attitude and independence will the learner be in a position to go and get the things he really wants and needs for himself. In the case of pronunciation, those able to make these kinds of judgments have many highly accessible places (read: "on the Internet") that they can go to for outside help.

Teachers who know their own strengths and weaknesses can be straightforward about these with their students, to everybody's benefit. Teachers with good training and sensitivity can bring much profit to their students with their skills. Those who feel their own pronunciation is not a very reliable model can encourage students to use recordings and imitate them as closely as possible. There are many specific skills that language teachers can learn in order to improve their own and their students' pronunciation. But perhaps the most important skill for a teacher to practice and transmit to her students is that of candor, how to make a realistic appraisal of oneself and one's situation and resources – and that it is not only OK but desirable to do so – and how to become independent and take responsibility for one's own learning. Students are in any specific class for only a limited period of time. But if they leave a class with increased self-knowledge, sensitivity and resourcefulness, they will be lifetime learners able to continue to appraise, learn and grow on their own.

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Utterback, Ann S., & Michael Freedman. *Broadcast Voice Handbook*. Chicago: Bonus Books, 2000.

Some recommended pronunciation texts (far from exhaustive; all books are paperback) **and Websites**

Cook, Ann. *American Accent Training: A Guide to Speaking and Pronouncing American English for Everyone Who Speaks English as a Second Language.*   2nd ed. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's, 2000. 198pp. With 5 CDs, mirror, 3 felt pens.
     A commercial package that covers trouble sounds, reduced sounds, linking, and rhythm, with "Nationality Guides" for 8 major languages.

Gilbert, Judy. *Clear Speech: Pronunciation and Listening Comprehension in American English.* 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Student's Book with audio CD. 174pp.
     This book sets the standard for the whole field, in the writer's opinion. A carefully programmed, straight-to-the-point course that can be finished in two semesters, with exercises designed for speakers from many different language backgrounds. *Clear Speech* concentrates on the key areas of pronunciation, such as "Sentence focus: Emphasizing content words" (Unit 6), "Voicing and syllable length" (Unit 13), and "Sibilants" (Unit 14), that offer students the greatest amount of insight and improvement in the shortest amount of time.

Gilbert, Judy. *Clear Speech From the Start: Basic Pronunciation and Listening Comprehension in American English.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Student's Book with audio CD. 131pp.
     Clear Speech for beginners. Makes greater use of graphics; focuses on most crucial sounds, phrases rather than words, spelling rules.

Gilbert, Judy & Pamela Rogerson. *Speaking Clearly: Pronunciation and listening comprehension for learners of English.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 136pp. Two cassettes available separately.
     Divided into two parts, "Pronunciation" and "Listening", with lots of practice exercises in both, for intermediate and advanced students. Includes chapters on "Basic sentence stress" (6), "Thought groups" (13, 14), "Puff of air (aspiration)" (21), "Getting key information" (27, 28).

Graham, Carolyn. *Jazz Chants: Rhythms of American English for Students of English as a Second Language.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. 143pp. Cassette or CD available separately.
     This book helps students get a feel for English rhythm through exaggerated ESL "rap", which can later be carried over into ordinary speech. One of a series of related books.

Grant, Linda. *Well Said: Pronunciation for Clear Communication.* 2nd ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle. 2000. Book with CD. 229pp.
     Concentrates on spelling-pronunciation relationships, word endings, predicting stress, phrasing, pauses, intonation. Lots of practice material and opportunities for self-evaluation.

Hagen, Stacy A. *Sound advice: A Basis for Listening*. 2nd ed. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, 1999. 183pp. Cassette available separately.
     Good listening practice – which naturally also carries over into pronunciation – in reductions, linking, word endings, function words, statement and question intonation.

Hewings, Martin & Sharon Goldstein. *Pronunciation Plus: Practice through Interaction (North American English)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998. 146pp. Cassettes available separately.
     Made up almost entirely of exercises, with very short explanations. Covers all the main points of pronunciation with examples in relatively simple English. Lots of line drawings.

Miller, Sue F. *Targeting Pronunciation: The Intonation, Sounds and Rhythm of American English*. Houghton Mifflin, 1999. 270pp. With tapes or CDs; also available separately.
     What distinguishes this book from most others is its incorporation of numerous and varied task-based exercises designed to help students "transfer" newly-learned points of pronunciation to everyday use; contains well over a school year's worth of material.

Teschner, Richard V. & M. Stanley Whitley. *Pronouncing English: A stress-based approach with CD-ROM*. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2004. 296pp.
     The big strength of this book is its programmed presentation of English prosody and spelling. Excellent teacher resource.

Vaughan-Rees, Michael. *Rhymes and Rhythm: A Poem-based Course for English Pronunciation*. Basingstoke Hampshire: Macmillan, 1994. 181pp. Cassette available separately.
     This book uses a wide variety of mostly humorous and not-too-difficult poems to help students practice English rhythm and general pronunciation. Also good as a teacher resource.

Website:
"Pronunciation Tip of the Day", designed by John Maidment, from the University College London, at:
http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/johnm/eptotd/tiphome.htm. The tips are written with Standard British in mind, but most apply to other standard varieties of English as well.

Recommended pronunciation and phonetics texts for teachers

     There are many excellent texts which teachers can use to increase their knowledge of phonetics and English pronunciation; only three representative ones are cited here as examples.

Ladefoged, Peter. *A Course in Phonetics*. 5th ed. Stamford, CT: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005. With CD. 320pp. Paper.

Simply the best and most comfortable way to learn phonetics. Ladefoged is always clear, informative and engaging. Covers both North American and Standard British English. The new fifth edition is just out as of this writing.

Kreidler, Charles W. *The Pronunciation of English: A Course Book*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 308pp.
A comprehensive phonological approach to English pronunciation.

Shockey, Linda. *Sound Patterns of Spoken English*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 156pp.
Good for increasing awareness of processes of phonetic/phonological reduction in casual speech. Examples are mostly from Standard British English, but other varieties of English are represented as well.

Website:
There are many Websites with useful material on English pronunciation teaching; just one is mentioned here, that of:
John Wells, University College London: http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/

Suggested activities for English pronunciation practice

Basic skills:

1. **Echo method:** Instead of practicing pronunciation by just listening and repeating, first listen carefully to the live or recorded model in its entirety. Then pause to listen to the voice in your brain repeating the phrase you just heard. Only after you have clearly heard the "echo" of the model in your head do you repeat the phrase aloud. You will find that you sound much more accurate and authentic than if you hadn't gone through the intermediary process of listening to the "echo" in your head.

2. **Choosing an English model voice:** Each student should consciously choose a native speaker, such as a movie star (Tom Cruise? Meg Ryan?), radio announcer, politician, or personal acquaintance, as their personal spoken English model, and internalize the voice of this model for reference in pronunciation practice.

Pronunciation activities for class and independent work:

1. **Poetry recitation:** The instructor chooses interesting poems and prepares recorded models of them. These can be put on the class Website (Window Media Encoder http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/9series/encoder/default.aspx is a good recording program, and free), or copies on cassette or CD can made for the students. Teaching just one poem in class a week is usually enough. After explaining and discussing the content of the poem, and formal features like rhyme and meter, the instructor provides a spoken model for the class to do listen and repeat practice, line by line, using the echo method when needed. The next week in class, the instructor calls on individual students or asks for volunteers to recite the poem aloud, and offers individual corrections. Each student is asked to keep a

record of everybody's corrections in a pronunciation journal, and to hand in a summary of their journal at the end of the semester. Examples of poems suitable for memorization and recitation, with recordings in US and standard British English, are available here: http://ccms.ntu.edu.tw/~karchung/poetryF2004.htm

2. **Acting out a movie or TV scene:** The instructor chooses a suitable movie (e.g. Kramer vs. Kramer, When Harry Met Sally) or episode from a high-quality TV series (e.g. Ally McBeal, Seinfeld). Students choose a partner(s), do a transcription of the scene of their choice, then check their transcription against a script of the scene they find on the Internet (which itself may have mistakes in it that need correcting). The instructor sets aside class time for discussion and Q&A regarding parts of the show or movie that were not well understood, especially those requiring cultural background knowledge (examples: how the game of Scrabble is played, or what a "pet rock" is). Students practice their parts with the echo method and/or listen and repeat. Later they rehearse with their partner, then give a class performance. Both instructor and students can give their feedback on the assignment and individual performances afterwards.

3. **Pronunciation differentiation tests**: Problem sounds and words like *pick, peek, pig* and *alone, along, a lawn* can be collected over the semester and incorporated into quizzes in which the instructor reads aloud one of the words or expressions in each series, and students must circle the correct answer. The quizzes can help the instructor and students identify with precision just what needs further work.

4. **Compound noun stress/syllable practice quizzes:** Items for short quizzes on phrase and compound stress can be collected from texts the students are reading in class. Sample quiz items: WOOLen *DRESS, *BUSIness school, *MOtorcycle accident, FRESH *MUSHrooms. Students circle the stressed syllables (caps are used here) and asterisk * the tonic (final stressed) syllable in each item. The quizzes should be given until everybody in the class gets a score of 70% or better. Some students may have problems correctly identifying and counting syllables; this is a good opportunity for review and practice. Students with a better grasp of what constitutes a syllable, and the rules for compound and phrase stress, can help teach those who are having difficulty.

5. **Making a "before" and "after" recording:** Have the students record themselves at the beginning of the semester and then write an appraisal of what they hear. They can listen again and write another appraisal of their "before" recording and hand it in together with their pronunciation journal summary at the end of the semester or school year, noting the progress they've made.