

Coordinating improvements in pronunciation teaching for adult learners of English as a second language

by Helen Fraser, University of New England
June 2000

Commonwealth of Australia.

Funded under the ANTA Adult Literacy National Project by the Commonwealth through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Executive Summary

The research reported here had its origin in the observation that many learners of English as a second language have major difficulties with English pronunciation, often even after years of English lessons, with concomitant major disadvantages in all areas of life, notably in employment.

This observation, combined with the observation that many English language teachers have major problems in teaching pronunciation, prompted a proposal to review the situation of pronunciation teaching across a range of contexts, and to recommend a coordinated strategy for improving the situation.

The project involved a survey based on informal interviews with teachers, learners, administrators, researchers, teacher trainers, and policy makers whose work relates to English language teaching in a wide range of contexts, in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. Details on who was interviewed and when are available in Section 9.

The project also involved creation of a computer disk for learners seeking to improve their English pronunciation; details on this are available in Section 8.

In conducting the research, it became clear that the situation is a very complex one, with policy issues playing a major role, so the report also includes a review of the programs, policy and policy research that has a bearing on the teaching of English as a second language.

While it is true that methods used for teaching pronunciation are in need of improvement, it is also true that current policy directions are leading to a situation in which, even if pronunciation teaching methods were maximally effective, it would be difficult for learners to access teachers who had the ability to help them.

The bulk of the paper reports the findings of the research, provides necessary background about pronunciation, and makes a series of recommendations.

The main issues raised are the following:

- The problem of insufficient distinction in policy between native (or highly proficient) speakers of English and ESL learners who still have poor English skills. The commonly used category 'NESB' needs to be subdivided in order to measure more specifically, and provide for, the needs of ESL learners.
- The insufficient distinction in policy between literacy needs and oral communication needs. It is philosophically interesting - and valid for certain purposes - to note the lack of a sharp distinction between literacy and oracy, and even to consider oral communication a 'kind of literacy'. However the very real practical needs of ESL learners are being compromised by the failure of the system adequately to distinguish and cater for those who need help specifically with oral communication.
- The widespread lack of confidence, and lack of effectiveness, of general ESL teachers in teaching pronunciation.
- The lack of reliable, systematic research on which to base critical decisions about ESL pronunciation and pronunciation teaching.

The main recommendations of the study are:

- Policy research is needed on the extent and effects of oral communication problems among learners of ESL (as a subset of the 'NESB' category), in order to provide more, and more detailed and focused, information than is available from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia.
- Improvements are needed in the system of identifying those with ESL pronunciation problems in VET contexts, so that they are not subsumed into general Language Literacy and Numeracy programs until their oral communication skills are sufficient to enable them to benefit from these.
- There is a need for the creation of language guidelines for multilingual workplaces, not be implemented by workplace trainers - *not* (emphatically), to teach or assess ESL pronunciation, which should be done by specialists, but to encourage interaction between native and non-native speakers and create opportunities for the informal conversation practice which is such an important component of learning pronunciation.
- ESL teachers need to be provided with courses and materials to help them improve their effectiveness in teaching pronunciation. They also need to be better supported in the context of the many demands that the changing system is placing upon them.
- There is a need for high quality, effective materials, especially computer-based materials with audio demonstrations, for learners of ESL pronunciation, both for self access and for use in classes where the teacher needs support of this kind.
- There is a great need for increased scholarly research on ESL pronunciation and ESL pronunciation teaching and for a more systematic approach to resolving debates about the relative effectiveness of methods and materials.
- In particular, there is an urgent need for development of a range of assessment tools to measure learners' proficiency in pronunciation, and diagnose areas of need for them. Without such a tool it is virtually impossible to compare or demonstrate the effectiveness of methods or materials.

About the author

Helen Fraser is a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of New England, with more than twenty years experience in teaching and researching phonetics, phonology and psycholinguistics. She has been working specifically on second language phonology and the teaching of pronunciation for the last four years. She is a newcomer to policy issues.

You can read more about Dr Fraser at <<http://metz.une.edu.au/~hfraser>>.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the large number of people who gave me their time and freely shared information and ideas about all aspects of pronunciation teaching. Without them this report could not have been produced. I have listed the names of the main people who contributed to this project at the end.

Though it may be iniquitous to single out individuals, I would like especially to acknowledge the very generous contributions of the following people with whom I had particularly long discussions, and to whom many of the best ideas in this report are due - though I of course accept full responsibility for any errors or omissions.

Patricia Fowler, Annie Bartlett, Fiona Cotton, Bronwen Macnamara, Margie Sainsbury, Margaret Tong, Alex Barthel, Stephanie Claire, Ross Forman, Alison Winkworth, Halina Zawadski

Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACAL	Australian Council for Adult Literacy
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACL	Australian Centre for Languages
AEMP	Advanced English for Migrants Program
ALIO	Adult Literacy Information Office
ALNARC	Australian Literacy and Numeracy Research Centre
AMEP	Adult Migrant Education Program
AMES	Adult Migrant English Service
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
ASLPR	Australian Spoken Language Proficiency Rating
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ITAB	Industry Training and Assessment Board
LLN	Language Literacy and Numeracy
LSIA	Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (Dept of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs)
NAWTB	National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body
NCELTR	National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NNS	Non-native Speaker (of English)
NRS	National Reporting System
NS	Native Speaker (of English)
NTF	National Training Framework
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
SGAV	Structuro-Global Audio-Visual
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESOL	Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages
TP	Training Package
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WCG	Workplace Communication Group
WELL	Workplace English Language and Literacy

Outline

1	Introduction	7
2	Current Status: Who gets ESL pronunciation tuition?	11
2.1	Categories of learners	11
2.1.1	Recent arrivals from non-English speaking countries: migrants, refugees	11
2.1.2	Longer term immigrants	13
2.1.3	NNS Jobseekers.....	14
2.1.4	NNS Prisoners.....	14
2.1.5	NNS Workers: Professional, self-employed, etc.....	15
2.1.6	NNS Workers: Regulated by VET policy	15
2.1.7	NNS University students.....	17
2.1.8	NNS TESOL students	18
2.1.9	ELICOS students	18
2.2	Research environment.....	19
2.3	Conclusion	20
3	Background on second language pronunciation	20
3.1	Why is pronunciation so difficult to learn?	20
3.1.1	Some common misconceptions about second language pronunciation.....	21
3.1.2	Pronunciation as cognition	23
3.1.3	Pronunciation as skill	25
3.1.4	Pronunciation as communication	25
3.2	What learners need	25
3.2.1	Conversation	26
3.2.2	Drilling.....	26
3.2.3	Expert guidance.....	26
3.2.4	Critical listening.....	27
3.3	Conclusion	27
4	Current Status: Who gives pronunciation tuition?.....	27
4.1	General ESL teachers	27
4.2	Workplace Trainers.....	29
4.3	Pronunciation specialists.....	29
4.3.1	ESL background.....	30
4.3.2	Speech pathology background	30
4.3.3	‘SGAV’ practitioners.....	31
4.4	Why is pronunciation so difficult to teach?.....	32
4.5	Research environment.....	34
	Conclusion	35
5	Analysis.....	35

5.1	Prioritisation of oral communication in training.....	35
5.2	LLN policy	36
5.3	Policy research.....	37
5.4	ESL teachers	37
5.5	Pronunciation research.....	37
5.6	Assessment and diagnosis issues.....	38
6	Recommendations	39
6.1	Help for learners.....	39
6.1.1	Research on the extent and effects of oral communication problems.....	39
6.1.2	Improvements to the system of identifying ESL pronunciation problems	40
6.1.3	Creation of guidelines for multilingual workplaces.....	40
6.2	Help for teachers.....	41
6.2.1	Improved training for teachers	41
6.2.2	Provision of materials and courseware for teachers and learners	42
6.2.3	Increased research on pronunciation teaching methodology.....	42
7	The current research: what was done.....	43
8	The Computer disk	44
9	People consulted.....	46
10	References	50

1 Introduction

The primary concern of this study is the situation of non-native speakers of English who have come to live in Australia as adults and have difficulty learning to speak English in a way that makes them easily intelligible to native speakers. This is a serious problem for many people.

Poor English language skills affect outcomes of literacy and other training, and employment prospects

The inability to converse easily in English is not only socially isolating and a hindrance to general settlement. It is also a serious barrier to other learning, since so many forms of tuition, including the teaching of literacy, require spoken English as the medium of instruction. Thus, the Australian Bureau of Statistics 'Aspects of Literacy' survey in 1996 showed that non-native speakers are about three times as likely to have Level 1 (the lowest) literacy skills as native speakers.

Further, it is a serious obstacle to employment. The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), which tracked over 5000 immigrants in the mid 1990s found that 18 months after arrival, immigrants were in employment at the following rates, according to their English language speaking ability (separate from reading and writing ability):

Rates of employment among immigrants 18 months after arrival in Australia, according to proficiency in speaking English (excluding those not actively seeking work)
 Source: Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999

First language	Speak very well	Speak well	Speak not well	Speak not at all
70%	59%	46%	26%	12%

VandenHeuvel and Wooden's later study (1999:27) shows that even after three and half years, the unemployment rate among their sample of those who spoke English 'well' was 8% (close to the national average), whereas that of those who spoke English 'poorly' was 41%.

Pronunciation as most critical oral communication skill

Being able to speak English of course includes a number of sub-skills, involving vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, etc. However by far the most important of these skills is pronunciation - with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite other errors; with poor pronunciation, a speaker can be very difficult to understand, despite accuracy in other areas. Pronunciation is the aspect that most affects how the speaker is judged by others, and how they are formally assessed in other skills (eg. ANTA 1999: *A New Assessment Tool* p.10 tells of a manager who severely underestimated workers' literacy levels due to their poor pronunciation).

Pronunciation as most difficult aspect of language to acquire

Ironically, pronunciation is also the aspect of language that is most difficult to acquire. Although some people with 'an ear for language' can 'pick up' pronunciation very effectively, for most it requires special training - we will look at the reasons for this in more detail below. Most learners are highly aware of this and constantly request further tuition in pronunciation. For example, Waller (undated) showed nearly half of all learners wished for more teaching on

pronunciation, considerably higher than the figures for listening, reading and writing.

Unfortunately, the reality is that in most English language courses, pronunciation is the aspect upon which least time is spent. This is no accident, and highlights the second major concern of this report.

Pronunciation as aspect on which least time is spent in ESL courses

The second concern is the difficulties faced by teachers of English as a second language in providing effective help with pronunciation for learners. Though there are teachers who are confident and effective in this area, the majority are unconfident - a common observation quantified and elaborated by Brown (1992) and Claire (1993). Indeed, there is some reason for teachers' lack of confidence, since many have received little training in how to teach pronunciation, and even where they have, many standard methods of pronunciation teaching are less than ideally effective. More will be said about this below.

However, any English language teaching is better than none, and will have a beneficial effect upon the pronunciation of the learner. The problems already mentioned are compounded by the greater problem that many people who need ESL tuition are not getting access to it.

The system does not optimise the availability of pronunciation tuition for those who need it

The third major concern of this report is the structural and systemic difficulties that prevent learners with needs in the area of English pronunciation being matched with teachers who have the ability and opportunity to provide help for them. I will be showing below that developments over the last decade in Vocational Education and Training policy, while having many good outcomes, are serving to more seriously disadvantage, rather than help, those for whom English is a second language.

Structure of this report

In what follows I will tease out some of these complex issues, and make a number of recommendations. The report is structured so as

- to outline the current status of pronunciation teaching, first from the learners' and then first the teachers' point of view,
- to provide a certain amount of necessary background about the nature of second language pronunciation and the needs of learners and teachers,
- to set out an analysis of the main issues and the factors that contribute to the rather serious current situation, and finally
- to make a number of recommendations as to how the situation might be improved.

Before starting it will be useful to clarify several terms that will be used frequently, and in so doing, foreshadow some of the main issues to be raised.

Non-native speaker (NNS), not non-English speaking background (NESB)

This report is concerned with non-native speakers¹ (NNSs) of English, as opposed to the more common classification of 'people of non-English speaking background (NESB)'. The NESB classification covers anyone who uses a language other than English at home, which includes those who have grown up in Australia and are actually very

¹ It is clear of course that the category of interest is not 'non-native speakers', but 'non-proficient speakers', those still in relatively early stages of learning the language - and perhaps a new acronym 'NPS' needs to be introduced. Nevertheless the term NNS is used throughout the present report.

fluent in English². NNSs are those from an overseas background who have learned, or are learning, English in adulthood.

Non-native speakers with low English proficiency are a distinct subset of the 'NESB' category - but policy research tends not to study them separately

Though NESB people undoubtedly form an 'equity group' in the sense that they have been shown to suffer various kinds of disadvantage, I will be arguing below that the category 'NESB' as used in much policy research is too broad for some purposes and should be broken down in appropriate cases. In particular, I will argue that the subset of NESB people who have learned English as adults, and still have trouble expressing themselves orally in English, are a special case with specific needs, and that these needs are obscured by use of the global 'NESB' category in so much research.

'Levels of English language proficiency vary greatly, but where they are low they pose the greatest barrier to training and employment for NESB people. As Misko (1997, p.61) argued, 'being of non-English speaking background seems of little relevance to being employed as an apprentice or trainee. What was important was the ability to speak English'.' (Volkoff and Golding 1998: 45)

Others within the NESB group are native speakers of an Aboriginal language, and while it is important to emphasise their ESL needs, they need to be treated as a separate sub-category from the immigrants, as their situation is significantly different.

Children who immigrate from non-English speaking countries of course also have ESL needs, but once again these needs are quite distinct from the needs of adults. In particular, pronunciation is one of the least problematic aspects of language for them, while for adults it is the most difficult.

Oral communication, as opposed to literacy

ESL pronunciation is sometimes insufficiently distinguished from literacy

This report is concerned specifically with spoken English, and the problems NNSs have with oral communication. Literacy is a very important but quite different issue, which has had a great deal of attention in policy research over the last decade, sometimes at the expense of attention to oral communication. I will be arguing below that the pronunciation problems faced by NNSs are distinct from their literacy problems, and (a) should be reported separately, and (b) require different treatment.

Intelligibility, as opposed to acceptability

Intelligibility depends on the hearer as well as the speaker

This report is concerned with the problems of non-native speakers in learning English pronunciation. This is by no means to suggest that difficulties of communication between learners and native speakers are all the 'fault' of the learner. Nor is it to deny that 'intelligibility' is a two-way street; intelligibility certainly depends on the attitude of the listener as well as on the ability of the speaker. Many native speakers of Australian English are quite inexperienced and unskilled in listening to foreign accents, speaking clearly to help learners understand them, and in other aspects of cross cultural communication.

Indeed many native speakers are consciously or unconsciously prejudiced against those who speak with an unfamiliar accent - whether

² In cases where they speak with an identifiable accent or style, this is more appropriately called an 'ethnolect' (following Michael Clyne) than a 'foreign accent'.

Many NSs need education in how to communicate with NNSs

that is a non-standard native accent, an established non-native accent, or a learner's accent. These observations are undoubtedly as accurate for Australia³ as they are for the United States (Lippi-Green 1997), and there is certainly a role for education of native speakers in workplaces and other institutions in how to communicate with people who 'can't help their accent' (see Recommendations below).

This does not minimise learners' need for effective pronunciation lessons

However, this report is not about this issue. While there is nothing wrong with a foreign accent, many learners do not so much have a foreign accent, as have pronunciation difficulties that make it hard work for even the most willing interlocutor to speak with them. Surely anyone in this situation prefers to learn more intelligible pronunciation, even though they might well choose to retain an identifiable accent. Withholding appropriate tuition from learners on the grounds that one should not impose accent norms is itself a form of discrimination. It is quite possible for someone learning a new language to be taught to pronounce it in a way that is easily intelligible to native speakers without suggesting that they must sound like a native speaker. The aim of pronunciation tuition should be to help learners to speak English with an accent, or accents, of their choice.

This point can perhaps be clarified by emphasising that this research is not about 'acceptable' pronunciation - it is about intelligibility⁴, and about providing the help NNSs need to be able to speak in a manner that is easily intelligible to an ordinary Australian English speaker of average goodwill.

Pronunciation, as opposed to elocution

The needs of non-native speakers are different from those of native speakers - even those with oral communication

This report is concerned specifically with the problems of non-native speakers. Many native speakers also have trouble in speaking clearly and expressing themselves confidently, especially in public situations. These difficulties can affect their advancement in employment, and certainly do need to be addressed. However the difficulties of non-native speakers are qualitatively and quantitatively different, and teaching them requires different methods.

One of the problems caused by policy changes over the last decade is that the distinction between the needs of native speakers and non-native speakers is being blurred in vocational education and training contexts. I will be arguing in what follows that non-discrimination means treating NNSs as a separate category of learner with different needs from native speakers.

Pronunciation, as opposed to articulation

Having made all these points, it is important to emphasise that 'pronunciation' in this report is used in a communicative sense, and includes all aspects of the production of a flow of speech that is easily intelligible to ordinary native speakers of Australian English, including

³ This observation is supported by data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants in Australia: Cobb-Clark and Chapman (1999) point out that 18 months after arrival, the unemployment rate even of immigrants who speak English 'very well' is two and a half times greater than that of native speakers, and suggest that it is plausible to blame discrimination for part of this difference.

⁴ Again, it is recognised that 'intelligibility' does, at the limit, depend on the listener as well as the speaker. While it is useful to explore this issue in certain contexts, for the context of pronunciation teaching, it is easy to operationalise the idea of 'intelligibility' by invoking a notion of 'average Australian listener', and where necessary for accuracy, conducting intelligibility experiments with groups of average Australian listeners.

Communicative approach to pronunciation

intonation, voice quality, use of pauses and rhythm patterns. In some circles the term 'pronunciation' is used in opposition to 'intonation', etc, to mean the accurate articulation of individual sounds, and connotes a behaviouristic attitude to ESL teaching. This usage is very unfortunate, as I strongly endorse a communicative approach to pronunciation teaching which does not separate all these aspects of speech. To bypass these connotations, I frequently use the term 'oral communication' in place of 'pronunciation' - but it should be recalled that I mean oral communication for ESL learners.

2 Current Status: Who gets ESL pronunciation tuition?

In this section, we look at pronunciation teaching in Australia from the learners' point of view, starting with the question, 'Who gets pronunciation tuition?'

Pronunciation is taught as part of general ESL courses

Perhaps a better question would be 'Who needs pronunciation tuition?'. Almost everyone who learns any second language as an adult needs explicit help with pronunciation; only very few with 'an ear for language' (and probably also with a favourable social and psychological situation) can get by with minimal instruction and gain the bulk of their learning through natural interaction with native speakers. Those who need English pronunciation tuition in Australia fall into a number of natural categories based upon their language background, their socio-cultural background, their general education levels, their motivation and reasons for learning English, their age, sex and general interests, the level of English already attained, and so on.

The reality is, however, that very few learners get pronunciation tuition as such; the vast majority get pronunciation teaching as part of a general ESL program. Much ESL teaching is regulated by policy or tradition in ways which categorise learners in rather different ways to those just mentioned. The next sections describe the categories that are relevant to the type of ESL tuition a migrant gets, and some of the issues that affect the benefit they will gain from the pronunciation component of their course.

2.1 Categories of learners

Two main issues will be raised here, to be discussed more fully below. The first is the failure of the system to place learners whose main needs are for ESL instruction in classes where this main need can be met. The second is the uneven effectiveness of the pronunciation teaching learners receive, even if they are placed in appropriate ESL classes.

2.1.1 Recent arrivals from non-English speaking countries: migrants, refugees

Probably the most obvious category of people requiring training in oral communication, along with all other aspects of English, is that of new arrivals from non-English speaking countries. These people have often had little exposure to English, though their educational level in their home language might be high. Then again it might be very low, depending on their background. One of the challenges for teachers of this group of learners is the enormous variability in their backgrounds, not just in terms of their native language but in terms of their life histories, culture and education.

AMEP provision for new migrants

New migrants and refugees are entitled to up to 510 hours of free English language tuition (to be taken over one to three years) through the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP). The AMEP is a highly respected organisation set up in the post war years (it recently celebrated its 50th anniversary)⁵, now funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The 510 hours is supplemented by the Home Tutor scheme, also widely respected, and also organised through the AMEP, in which native speaker volunteers are given a small amount of training and assigned to one-on-one interaction with learners, involving conversation and informal lessons.

Traditionally, AMEP courses were provided by the publicly funded Adult English Migrant Service (AMES) and the TAFE system. However, their provision was recently put out for commercial tender. In NSW, the AMEP is now administered by different groups in different regions: by a consortium headed by the Australian Centre for Languages (ACL) in some regions, and by the AMES, now part of the NSW Department of Education and Training, in others. In Victoria, the AMES itself, in conjunction with a consortium of private providers, won the tender.

The goal of AMEP tuition is to give learners 'functional English' as measured by the passing of the various levels of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE). Once this has been attained, the learner's entitlement to tuition under the AMEP ceases.

The AMEP training is in general English, including the four basic skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. There is no required breakdown of these areas, beyond the requirement of attainment of the various levels of the CSWE.

Pronunciation not always a priority in AMEP classes

The degree of focus on pronunciation is within very broad limits up to the teacher, and varies considerably, depending on individual teachers' interests and skills. My interviews revealed a widespread lack of confidence among teachers regarding pronunciation teaching, which means it is often avoided.

The NSW Adult Literacy Information Office (ALIO), which provides curricula and materials for TAFE courses, advised that there is a specific pronunciation course on the books of all TAFEs. This course has 2 modules, 'Focus on Pronunciation' and 'Using Pronunciation Skills', and provides 90 hours of tuition. However, of the 12,000 students who did ESL courses at TAFEs around NSW in 1999, only 159 have done this pronunciation course. The reason is lack of resources and lack of teachers able to run it, certainly not lack of interest from learners.

Variable effectiveness of AMEP in teaching pronunciation

Of course, not all migrants avail themselves fully of the AMEP within their first three years. Different regions have different patterns of reach, and different migrant groups vary considerably in their motivation and also in the degree to which their life circumstances enable them to make use of this service (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999).

⁵ In 1997, the Program provided tuition to nearly 40,000 clients drawn from 89 language backgrounds: major countries of origin were China, Vietnam and the former Yugoslavia; 60 per cent were female; 40 per cent male; 75 per cent were aged between 20 and 44; 79 per cent were located in the most highly populated states of New South Wales (49 per cent) and Victoria (30 per cent), with the remainder distributed throughout the other states and territories. (Source: AMEP webpage)

For those that do, it has to be said that there is a degree of hit and miss involved in their likelihood of getting effective help with pronunciation as part of their AMEP tuition. This is highlighted by the following table, showing rates of improvement of those migrants who assess themselves on arrival as speaking English 'well', 'not well' and 'not at all'. The figures are hardly worthy of complacency. Neither is VandenHeuvel and Wooden's conclusion (1999:61) that 'three and a half years after immigrating to Australia, the data indicate that about a quarter of the sample had either poor English skills or none at all'.

Rates of improvement in English speaking ability (self-assessed) of principal applicant after 1.5 and 3.5 years in Australia. The table should be read from left to right: of all migrants in the categories shown at left, the percentages shown in the two right-hand columns had attained the levels indicated in the timeframes indicated.

(Source: LSIA, courtesy of David Osborne. Further detail in VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999).

English level	6 months after arrival	1.5 years after arrival	3.5 years after arrival
Best/only			
Very well			
Well		4	8
Not well		57	58
Not at all	100	38	33
Best/only			
Very well		1	4
Well		32	44
Not well	100	64	49
Not at all		2	2
Best/only		3	5
Very well		19	25
Well	100	70	63
Not well		8	6
Not at all			

2.1.2 Longer term immigrants

Although 510 hours is a generous allocation by world standards, it is clear that many new arrivals finish their AMEP course still with problems in oral communication.

Post-AMEP tuition
for migrants

After the 510 hours' AMEP entitlement is over, further English language lessons may be available for job-seekers or, for those in employment, through workplace training, about which more below. For those not in the workforce, the Home Tutor Scheme is available free of charge, and jurisdictions with high migrant populations often provide language help through Migrant Resource Centres and other welfare programs.

Alternatively, migrants can pay for further tuition either privately, or at subsidised rates through the Technical and Further Education (TAFE), or Adult and Community Education (ACE) systems. Of course this requires a degree of motivation, and the overcoming of a range of personal and systemic obstacles, and this is the time at which migrants' learning rate is likely to taper off and 'fossilisation' set in.

2.1.3 NNS Jobseekers

Mutual Obligation system

After a certain waiting period, immigrants who cannot find work are entitled to unemployment benefits in line with all other residents. They also have to comply like all other residents with the new Mutual Obligation system, which imposes certain requirements upon job-seekers, as well as offering a range of opportunities to those who are able to take effective advantage of them.

All this is organised by Centrelink, in cooperation with a number of private employment agencies and training providers. Employment agencies are paid by the government for finding jobs and/or job-related training for the unemployed, with funds provided to the agency at each of a number of points (upon application by the job-seekers, upon the client's employment, after the client's first six months of continuous employment, etc). The less training a client needs, and the more quickly the training leads to the client's employment, the more quickly the agency will receive its funding for that client, and the more of the funding can be kept as profit.

Clients with particular barriers to employment, including but not limited to low Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) skills, are identified by Centrelink through placement interviews (Fitzpatrick et al 1999), and training can be funded under one of a number of schemes (Centrelink: 'What are your Options?' booklet).

Only one of the training schemes is specifically for ESL learners - the Advanced English for Migrants Program (AEMP) - and that is only for those assessed at ASLPR Level 2 or above (relatively high).

All other ESL learners are covered by the LANT (Literacy and Numeracy Training) program or the Intensive Assistance program, both of which also cover all other categories of LLN needs. Commercial pressures, as well as lack of awareness of the problems it can cause, mean that many NNSs whose main need is for oral communication tuition are placed in literacy classes, often in mixed groups of NSs and NNSs. Another strong pressure is to target classes towards the needs of a specific employer who may be able to provide jobs to those who complete the course. This means that English language is more often the medium of instruction rather than the topic, and ESL learners can very easily be left behind.

Hit and miss nature of pronunciation assistance for ESL jobseekers

Even if the learner does get into a dedicated ESL class, the amount of time, inclination, and skills the teacher will have for pronunciation, as opposed to literacy and other aspects of language is highly variable, as will be discussed further below.

Again, the situation from the learner's point of view can best be described as 'hit and miss' as far as pronunciation goes.

2.1.4 NNS Prisoners

The investigation of English teaching in correctional centres was not part of the original plan for this research, and I did not visit any such institutions. However I was contacted by a teacher from a prison in South Australia who had read about this work and wished to bring the situation of NNS prisoners to my attention. She was very concerned at the inability of the system to provide effective help with oral communication skills as part of the ESL provision for this group, and hoped that the work being done here would benefit them. Although only one person rang up, there is every reason to suspect that

pronunciation is a hit or miss situation for prisoners, as for the other categories discussed here (cf. Senate enquiry 1996, Golding and Volkoff 1999).

2.1.5 NNS Workers: Professional, self-employed, etc

Many migrants of course come straight into jobs, or find employment soon after arrival. Professionals, or the self-employed, get no further government funded tuition after their AMEP entitlement, but they are of course able to pay for their own tuition if they are motivated to do so.

Unregulated
market for private
pronunciation
provision

Such people can be referred through any of various channels to private pronunciation tutors. I spoke about the situation to a number of such providers. They generally had more work than they needed and did not advertise beyond word of mouth. While most of the providers I spoke to impressed me with their knowledge and dedication, they made it clear that this is an unregulated market, and providers operate under no constraints other than client satisfaction. Each was aware of cases of unqualified people taking on this kind of work.

From the learner's point of view, it is difficult to find a pronunciation tutor, and even more difficult to be sure that the one they do find is qualified and effective. Learners often have little idea about what they need for pronunciation tuition, and are inclined to trust their teachers.

Unregulated
market for
pronunciation
computer disks

Another direction for motivated learners to turn is to self-access materials, especially computer disks. This market also is quite unregulated and there is certainly a degree of exploitation of learners, with many of these disks created by computer specialists with no expertise in any aspect of language teaching (cf. Carey 1998). More will be said about this below.

2.1.6 NNS Workers: Regulated by VET policy

The National
Training
Framework

A large proportion of workers are employed in that sector of the workforce regulated by Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy. Over recent years there has been an enormous reorganisation and reorientation of this sector brought about by the National Training Framework (NTF). Literacy and numeracy training has been important part of these developments. This relates to the history of this area of policy, which was influenced heavily by research demonstrating the poor literacy levels of native speakers in the workforce, especially among younger workers (ACAL: 'Surveys and Beyond', ABS: 'Aspects of Literacy').

Integrated
workplace training

One effect of the NTF has been large increases in the amount of work-related training that employers are required to provide for employees: for example, various types of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) training are compulsory, and workers must be provided with a certain amount of training in order to maintain their skill levels in changing times. Various types of government funding are available to employers to help them fulfil these obligations. Employers are also expected to fund training themselves, on the grounds that this will enhance the productivity of their workforce.

The focus of such workplace training is on 'integrated' training - training related specifically to the needs of a particular workplace, as opposed to 'generic' training, which can be applied in a range of

different work environments. There is strong interest in flexibility, responsiveness and commercial viability of training, but also in retaining a high degree of regulation, through requirements for training providers' registration, outcomes reporting and general accountability procedures.

Another aspect of the NTF has been the quantification of the skills or competencies required for a wide range of jobs at different levels in different industries. This allows regulation of training provision, both in terms of the ongoing upskilling of the workforce in general, and in terms of the equity of opportunities in the workplace.

This quantification of competencies is done through the creation of Training Packages (TPs). These are not curricula or training materials as such, but lists of competencies against which workers in different jobs can be assessed, and their suitability for the job, or need for training, determined, in line with a range of equity policies.

Training
Packages, and
Industry Training
and Assessment
Boards

The production of TPs is done by a number of Industry Training and Assessment Boards (ITABs), each one representing a group of related industries (for example, Australian Light Manufacturing ITAB (ALMitab), Cultural Research Education & Training Enterprise Australia (CREATE Aust.), National Mining ITAB, National Wholesale Retail & Personal Services Industry Training Council (National WRAPS)).

The task of producing a full range of TPs is a large one, still in progress, and indeed expected to be ongoing, as continual revision will be necessary.

Indeed the whole NTF, while generally considered to be on the right track, is very much in its development phase, and there are a number of major concerns about equity and other issues (cf. the current Senate enquiry⁶ into the quality of vocational education and training in Australia, being conducted by the Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee).

One area of particular concern is the need for assessment of worker trainees against the competencies of TPs, and the need to guard against inequity or discrimination in this process (cf *A Bridge to the Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003*). The National Reporting System (NRS) has been developed as a calibration tool, and as a way of raising awareness of the many issues of assessment. The National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body (NAWTB) is producing a large amount of material designed to assist trainers and assessors in their work. They face an enormous task, and are highly aware of a number of quite problematic issues that they face.

Equity and the
National Training
Framework

Since many workplace competencies either directly or indirectly involve language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills, and since concern over the levels of LLN skills in the workforce was one of the main motivations for development of the NTF, LLN has been a primary concern in development of TPs. Considerable guidance has been given to ITABs in the development of TPs over the inclusion of LLN competencies, and the need for assessment and training in LLN in the

Language Literacy
and Numeracy
policy

⁶ It is interesting to note that the terms of reference of this very wide-ranging Senate enquiry, which intends to investigate many aspects of equity in the rapidly changing VET sector, makes no reference at all to NESB people, let alone NNSs, as an equity group.

workforce. The Workplace Communication Group (WCG), funded by the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) scheme from 1997-1999, was prominent in providing information and guidance in these areas.

Slow improvement in industry awareness of importance of LLN in training

A number of TPs which benefited from input from the WCG are now considered to be exemplary in the area of LLN provision; as these are becoming better known, other ITABs are encouraged to see the advantages of good LLN coverage in TPs. However, by the WCG's own account, there is still a long way to go in raising awareness among employers of the value of LLN skills, and confidence that training in these areas will have a beneficial effect on the productivity of their industry.

The main concern of all this work has been with literacy (and numeracy, though that is not dealt with in the present report). The first 'L' of 'LLN' has been a much smaller concern, and even there is not principally interested in oral communication needs of NSs or NNSs, but rather in defining areas in which it is appropriate for languages other than English, or dialects other than Standard Australian English, to be used among workers.

ESL is not a separate priority in VET and learners often end up in inappropriate classes

Fortunately, this does not mean that the language learning needs of ESL workers are entirely neglected - the WELL scheme provides funds through competitive application for work related language and literacy training, and can be used for ESL provision. However, ESL teaching is generally provided in the context of literacy training, which in turn is often integrated with specific training related to a particular workplace - eg. OHS, report writing, manual reading, etc.

From the ESL learners point of view, this means they are often in mixed classes of native and non-native speakers, where the focus is on content rather on language. This is far from ideal, and can easily result in them getting little benefit at all from the classes, especially if their oral communication skills are low enough that they miss significant aspects of the content.

Good news stories

There are several good news stories. For example, my interviews informed me of a series of sessions specifically on oral communication provided by Telstra for NNS Call Centre workers. The Star Casino employs a permanent language and literacy consultant who can work on oral communication as she identifies needs.

Scepticism about value of language training

The more general picture that emerged from my interviews, however, was that employers were unlikely to give high priority to language issues. At least in some cases, this is not so much through lack of recognition of the problems caused in their industry by poor oral communication skills among NNSs, but rather more to scepticism about the likely returns on any training investment - and indeed it is true that improvement in pronunciation can be a slow process.

2.1.7 NNS University students

Universities fund language courses

Many university students come to Australia from non-English speaking countries specifically for their tertiary education, and all universities provide English language assistance for them, with both preparation courses and ongoing courses and workshops throughout their studies. Although these courses are funded and administered by the universities rather than directly by government, it is useful to look at this sector for comparison with the VET sector which is the focus of the present study.

Each university has a language and study skills centre which provides assistance for all students with essay writing, seminar presentation, etc, and most have specialist tuition available for ESL students. This is seen as an important selling point for overseas students and the language centres are in general relatively well funded. Some (eg. Melbourne University) are also starting to provide for-credit English language courses for NNS students, along the same lines as for-credit courses have always been given in languages other than English.

Good courses but
not suitable for
VET sector

The ESL assistance provided is generally of a high standard. Naturally there is a focus on written communication, but most centres provide at least some help with oral presentations, seminar participation etc. Some of these classes are very progressive, incorporating pronunciation into a general communicative framework, and giving learners practical advice on sociolinguistic aspects such as interrupting, disagreeing, holding the floor, etc (cf. Bartlett et al 1999). While the work done is very impressive, the courses and materials are not easily translatable to the VET context, due to the great differences in background and needs of learners in these sectors.

2.1.8 NNS TESOL students

Of the university students, a special but very important group in the present context is the group of overseas students studying to be English teachers when they return to their home countries. As we see below, TESOL courses vary in the extent to which they provide training in how to teach pronunciation. However for NNS TESOL students, the need to acquire intelligible pronunciation to model to their prospective students is at least as great as their need to learn effective techniques of teaching pronunciation.

The reality is that there is little opportunity within the course to work on their own pronunciation. Lecturers are compromised by lack of time within the curriculum, size and diversity of classes, disinclination to insult students by too much reference to their own poor pronunciation - and a need to maintain a steady stream of these lucrative overseas students. Some staff interviewed expressed a degree of despair as to the likely fate of the future students of these trainee teachers.

2.1.9 ELICOS students

ELICOS students
pay full fees

One large group of learners are those, generally young, students who come to Australia for a short intensive course in English as a foreign language, for which they pay full fees, with a view to returning to their own country with improved English skills for any of a wide range of purposes. These students are catered for by ELICOS centres (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students).

Since this is one of the few groups of learners which can pay for its tuition, many other types of language centre also have an ELICOS centre as a money-making component of their business. For example, most universities have an ELICOS centre as well as a centre for their own overseas students; and organisations such as ACL have an ELICOS component to their work. ELICOS courses generally have a higher proportion of computer-based courses, outings, etc, than others.

Again, though these courses are not regulated by VET policy, it was worth looking at this area for any good practice that could be

recommended in relation to VET LLN provision - one might assume that the best materials and most effective methods would be used for those learners who pay the most for their courses.

ELICOS tuition in general not better than publicly funded tuition

However I found this not to be the case. As in the public sector, the amount and type of work specifically on pronunciation varies greatly, and individual teachers expressed their lack of confidence and skill in dealing with pronunciation, showing great enthusiasm for the idea of professional development to help them with this area. None of the teachers I interviewed had thought of using computers for pronunciation, though they were widely used for email, internet, etc.

Many ELICOS students are particularly keen to acquire good English pronunciation and constantly call for more work on spoken English. The fact that these language centres are generally little able to respond to this call (though there are exceptions: eg. I believe the ACL has recently instituted a substantial pronunciation component) reinforces the idea, expanded below, that part of the problem with lack of provision of oral communication skills for ESL learners generally lies in the lack of methods and materials for teachers in this area.

2.2 Research environment

Much of the policy development described above has been driven by research, and responds to ongoing research, by dedicated centres such as the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Research Centre (ALNARC), etc.

Almost no policy research on NNSs oral communication problems

A careful search of the databases of these centres however reveals alarmingly little research that investigates the situation of NNSs as opposed to NESBs, or that looks at the needs for oral communication, as opposed to literacy, skills. This is in contrast to the large amount of research which has investigated and documented the effects of poor literacy and numeracy skills.

My efforts to find concrete information about some aspect of the situation of NNSs took me in a number of directions - including an attempt to analyse the throughput of WELL programs for their attention to and effects on NNSs and oral communication. However, the nature of the WELL accounting system, due to a perceived threat to client confidentiality, makes it impossible to do this.

LSIA is useful but not ideal - and little known in VET sector

The best concrete evidence on the situation of migrants with ESL needs is provided by the LSIA and other surveys by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs based on census data. Interestingly however this material is little known in VET circles. It has not yet been thoroughly analysed from a language needs perspective, and has not been fully utilised in developing policy in this area.

In fact, the data in these surveys is not ideal for the purposes of monitoring and developing ESL provision - for a variety of reasons, one of which is that it is based on subjects' self-assessment rather than on objective assessment of their levels and needs. More will be said about this below. However it is certainly better than nothing, and, as shown, provides strong support for the findings of the present informal research.

2.3 Conclusion

The conclusion from the above discussion can only be that there is a great need for oral communication tuition - but that this need is being met haphazardly. Though their main need may be for oral communication tuition, ESL learners may find themselves in literacy classes, or OHS classes, with NSs, in which they will find the proceedings difficult to follow precisely because of their unmet language needs. They may find themselves in ESL classes with a teacher who lacks confidence and skill in teaching oral communication, or in a class with a very skilful teacher who lacks time and resources to give attention to that learner's particular needs. Only the few, it seems, will end up in a class where their needs can be effectively met.

Maybe the situation we have is 'just the way it is', and first generation immigrants will always have a tough time with language and all that flows from it? I strongly believe that this is not the case. The fact that some learners attain good pronunciation relatively quickly, and some teachers are very effective in helping them, suggests possibilities. What is needed is a greater understanding of the needs of both learners and teachers, and a greater commitment to provision of these needs.

3 Background on second language pronunciation

3.1 Why is pronunciation so difficult to learn?

Noticeable accent likely for people who learn English after 6 years old

If we learn a second language in childhood, we generally learn to speak it fluently and without a 'foreign accent'; if we learn in adulthood, though we may attain considerable fluency and versatility, it is very unlikely that we will ever attain a native accent. The exact cut-off age differentiating these two scenarios is debated, and depends on a complex of factors. It was for some time accepted that the cut off age was around 13, and hypothesised that it had something to do with puberty. This link is now less accepted: recent American research (see Strange 1995) presents evidence that learning a new language even after the age of 6 will leave one with a slight but noticeable non-native accent.

Risk of intelligibility problems in those who learn after about 18

However, the present work is concerned not with the noticeability of an accent, but with its intelligibility. General observation suggests that it is those who start to learn English after their school years who are most likely to have serious difficulties in acquiring intelligible pronunciation, with the degree of difficulty increasing markedly with age. This difficulty has nothing to do with intelligence or level of education, or even with knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. A NNS university professor can have as much difficulty with pronunciation as anyone else. Many NNSs can read and write English at a higher level than their pronunciation would suggest. (The reverse situation of course can occur, depending on the person's English-learning history, but anecdotally seems to be less common among the learners studied during the present research - backed up by statistics (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999) showing that reading and writing skills are generally at higher levels than speaking skills among immigrants to Australia.

Of course there is no simple answer to why pronunciation is so difficult to learn - indeed there is a whole range of theoretical perspectives on the question. In what follows I present some ideas that are widely accepted among scholars who study second language

pronunciation, rather than one particular theoretical perspective on the issues.

The cause of foreign accent is cognitive, not physiological

What is generally accepted among psycholinguists and phonologists who specialise in this area, is that the difficulty of learning to pronounce a foreign language is *cognitive* rather than physical, and that it has something to do with the way 'raw sound' is categorised or conceptualised in using speech.

Put more simply, *if you want to change the way a learner pronounces words, you have to change the way they think about the component sounds of those words*. This goes not just for individual sounds, but for bigger elements of speech, such as syllables, stress patterns and rhythm.

Several 'commonsense facts' about second language pronunciation are incorrect

I will say more about this shortly, but first there are a few points that need to be made very clearly. There are several 'facts' which are widely believed as part of the 'commonsense' view of accents and how to 'cure' an accent, but are actually quite erroneous (cf. Beebe 1987). Some of these erroneous ideas are so deeply ingrained that people find it very challenging to be presented with a different view. I would like to take a few moments to discuss them.

3.1.1 Some common misconceptions about second language pronunciation

It is *not* the case that learners pick up English pronunciation if they are musical and don't if they are not, and that explicit tuition makes little difference

Pronunciation ability is not related to musical talent

It is widely believed that pronunciation skills are related to musical skills. However no link between musical ability and pronunciation ability has been demonstrated, and there are large numbers of people who have one of these 'natural talents' but not both. Second language pronunciation is a cognitive skill, for which some people may have more natural aptitude and/or interest and motivation than others, but which everyone can learn to a certain degree if given appropriate opportunities.

It is *not* the case that ESL learners are like the deaf, or like those with a speech pathology, and need similar help

Second language pronunciation problems are different from problems of deafness or speech pathology

The superficial similarities of the difficulties these groups have with pronunciation stem from very different causes. In particular, deaf people, or those with a speech pathology, are or are becoming native speakers of English; they are not learning English pronunciation from a position of already having native speaker knowledge of the sound system of another language. The main problem that second language learners have with pronunciation has to do with their need to *change* a conceptual pattern appropriate for their first language that they have internalised in childhood. NSs who are deaf or have a speech pathology do not have this cognitive problem to overcome.

It is *not* the case that learners are best helped if they are able to 'see' speech, whether in articulatory or acoustic form

Learners need help in categorising or conceptualising sounds in a way appropriate to English (and very different from what they are used to doing for their native language). Simply seeing a speechwave or a diagram of the articulation of a sound, however 'animated' and

'Seeing' speech doesn't help unless learners are also helped with cognitive aspect

however accurate⁷, will not help them unless they are *also* helped to understand what features of the sound are significant, and given appropriate ways of thinking about the sound so that they can reproduce it.

In fact it will be difficult for most learners - indeed for most teachers - to relate a speech wave⁸ or articulatory diagram to the auditory quality of the sounds - for exactly the same reason that instruction in terms of the detailed physiology of required shoulder movements is unlikely to help an aspiring tennis player perfect her stroke. In the case of the tennis player, what helps is instruction in how to *think* about the actions, eg. 'think about hitting it *beyond* the baseline', 'keep your eye on the ball'.

Since people generally think about sounds in terms of their auditory quality, rather than directly in terms of their articulation or acoustics, the key is to find ways of describing the auditory quality of sounds that makes sense to the learner.

There is a major role for the use of computers in helping learners with pronunciation - but it is not the role of displaying speechwaves with no guidance as to how they should be read.

It is *not* the case that learners have an accent primarily because they 'transfer' the sounds of the native language to English

'Transfer' is a useful notion - but only if its complexities are understood

The notion of 'transfer' as the 'cause' of accents and the key to helping learners with pronunciation has been seriously questioned by specialists for at least two decades (cf. Gass et al 1989, Bohn 1995, among others). Though there is some validity to the 'transfer' idea, it is only useful in an elaborated form which requires a good understanding of its limitations and ramifications. A simplistic idea that learners are transferring sounds from their native language to the new language is a hindrance rather than a help. It is unfortunate that so many teachers, as well as the general public, still hold so strongly to a simple notion of transfer.

It is *not* the case that accent is caused by an inability of speakers of other languages to produce the sounds of English.

Some English sounds *are* difficult to produce...

This is not to say that there are not individual sounds in English, or more especially combinations of sounds, that are difficult for learners from different backgrounds to produce. It is to say that this difficulty is a relatively minor aspect of intelligibility, and certainly not the main cause of the accent.

Firstly, individual sounds are not in themselves very important to intelligibility. After all, many native speakers, or fluent NNSs, pronounce individual sounds differently from the norm, with no

⁷ Many of the diagrams and animations used on computer disks are very far from accurate. The good thing is that since speakers have virtually no ability to conceptualise what goes on behind their tongue tip anyway, accurate or inaccurate information is about equally effective.

⁸ In fact, as any phonetician knows, speech waves are completely useless for comparison of a model with a learner's pronunciation, as they do not equate with relevant auditory aspects of pronunciation: two utterances which sound identical can have very different speech waves, and vice versa. To have a useful visual representation of speech, it is necessary to produce spectrograms (commonly but erroneously known as voiceprints), which require serious training to read properly.

...but individual sounds are not very important to intelligibility

Often learners *can* say the difficult sound - if they *think* about it differently

problems for intelligibility. A learner with good stress and intonation and poor pronunciation of, say, 'th', is very easy to understand.

Secondly, in many of the cases in which a learner seems to have trouble pronouncing a particular sound, it is easy to demonstrate that the learner commonly pronounces a perfectly acceptable version of the sound in another context. Consider for example a German learner of English who has difficulty with the 'v' sound in 'very' etc - and yet the sound of the German 'w' is virtually identical to English 'v'. The same goes for the classic case of 'r' and 'l': it is certainly not the case that learners cannot produce these sounds; in almost all cases, they can produce perfectly acceptable versions of both sounds. The problem is that they do not have concepts of them as separate sounds⁹, but rather think of them as indistinguishable variants of a single sound. Another classic case is the English vowel sound of words like 'bird', 'term', with which Japanese and other learners often have a lot of difficulty: that difficulty is not in producing the sound, which they can easily do if thinking about it as a non-speech sound. The difficulty is in developing a concept of the sound that they can use as a vowel in words.

As a final example, consider the notorious 'final consonant problem'. Even this is not primarily a problem of articulation. Consider a sentence like 'Put it back up' - bound to be difficult for speakers of languages like Thai which have a limited range of consonants in word final position. The difficulty such a learner has in imitating an English pronunciation of this sentence is caused by the *cognitive interpretation* of the relevant sounds as being 'word final'. The sentence as it is produced is a continuous flow of vowels and consonants. The pronunciation of the last three sounds of this sentence, '...ck up', is highly similar to that of the word 'cup' - and yet such a learner will have great difficulty with the former and little difficulty with the latter.

3.1.2 Pronunciation as cognition

Let us now consider the cognitive aspects of pronunciation a little further.

Perception of words depends on categorisation of sounds

Speech 'in itself' is continuous and unsegmented, as we hear when we listen to a language we do not know; speech as we hear it when we do know the language, is segmented into discrete units, of words, syllables and sounds (or letters, for the literate), and these segments are nameable according to the sound system and writing system of our native language. This segmented nature of speech is a product of our language-processing skills, not a property of speech itself. That is why a language you do not know seems to rush by in a continuous flow, whereas to its speakers, it is an orderly sequence of meaningful elements.

What is interesting is that speakers of different languages do this segmentation and labelling of the continuous flow in quite radically

⁹ Any more than English speakers have concepts of their initial and final 't' sounds as being 'separate sounds' - though they are phonetically quite different, as we see below. The very fact that we have separate terms for 'r' and 'l' but not for these quite radically different 't' sounds, shows the problems for learners of using English-based descriptions of sounds.

Learning a language imposes a particular way of categorising sounds

different ways, depending on the sound system and the writing system¹⁰ they have learned.

Once one has been inducted into a language, it is extremely difficult to hear speech in that language as 'raw sound' any more. Rather one hears it primarily in terms of the discrete units of the language one has learned - so much so that it is hard to imagine any other way of hearing it. But indeed there often are very different ways of hearing the sounds of a language, which can seem very surprising to someone who has never made much of a study of this phenomenon.

It is as if, when we use our mother tongue, we buy our efficiency in communication at the expense of a loss of sensitivity to other possible ways of hearing the sounds. Regaining that sensitivity can take years of work - and indeed is arguably impossible to fully accomplish.

Small sound differences the NS doesn't even notice can cause confusion to the NNS

A very brief example might help to clarify this point. Consider a learner who has difficulty distinguishing the pronunciation of 'bat' and 'bad'. The most natural thing for an English speaker to do to help is to exaggerate the pronunciation difference by saying 'baddddd, duh, duh, duh', and 'battttt, tuh, tuh, tuh', then give the learner practice with 'd' and 't' in isolation and in a range of words and phrases.

The problem is that in this kind of practice, the relevant sounds are isolated from the original words. In naming the letters¹¹, the English speaker changes their pronunciation in ways that are so natural as to be barely noticeable, even when it is pointed out. These changes are associated with the change of the letter in question from being word final to being word initial.

What the NS does not notice is that the pronunciation of sounds like 'd' in English is quite different when they occur word initially and word finally. Even more importantly, the NS does not realise that the sounds 't' and 'd' when they occur word finally in English are virtually identical: the difference between words like 'bat' and 'bad' is not primarily a difference in the pronunciation of 't' and 'd' at all - it is a difference between a short vowel and a long vowel. The learner would have been much more helped by being encouraged to lengthen the vowel in 'bad' than to exaggerate the 'd' - especially if they already have a tendency to add 'extra' vowels to the ends of words¹².

This is an isolated example, and should not be taken to imply a universal 'method' of teaching pronunciation. It is intended to give an example of how very 'obvious facts' about English can be mistaken - and misleading if imparted insensitively to learners. The point is that

¹⁰ Note that though it is common to 'blame' writing or spelling for learners' misconceptions of the sounds in the new language, the categories of any writing system (though in the case of a language with a spelling system as irregular as English this can be hard to believe) are given primarily by the categories of the *sound* system of the language it represents. It is the sound system, even more than the writing system, that affects the way speakers think about sounds. This is hard to explain briefly here, but is very important in understanding pronunciation. Though one may attempt to 'escape' the traps of English spelling, it is much more difficult to 'escape' the traps of the English sound system.

¹¹ English letter names and sounds tend to put the consonant first and follow it with a 'carrier' vowel, eg. 'bee, see, dee', 'buh, cuh, duh'. This is by no means universal, and it should not be assumed that a learner will automatically equate 'cuh, ah, tuh' with 'cat' in the way that seems so natural to English speakers.

¹² It is important also to do this without full explanation to the learner. Telling a learner, especially a beginner, that the 'd' at the end of 'bad' is like a 't' will make things more difficult, not easier.

there is often a difference between what sounds are like, and how they are conceptualised.

It is this difference in ways of conceptualising sounds that is at the heart of the problem of learning to pronounce a new language - much more so than inability to pronounce particular sounds. The problem in learning to pronounce a new language, then, has to do with the difficulty of reconceptualising sounds.

Although it is not necessary for language learners to have detailed awareness of what goes on in speech perception and production, it is an advantage for them to have a greater awareness of the way sounds can be conceptualised differently than a monolingual person. A minority of people can do this 'naturally'. Most need some help with this, even when in the 'luxurious' situation of being surrounded by the target language.

Similar observations apply to the larger units of speech, such as syllables, stress patterns and rhythm, although demonstration of this is too complex for the present context.

3.1.3 Pronunciation as skill

Another factor is the need for practice

Another factor that makes pronunciation difficult to learn is the skill component. Because pronunciation is not just a knowing-that, but a knowing-how, it requires practice and skill development. Though children are used to practising skills of many kinds, adults often find themselves unable or unwilling to do this, and need sensitive help.

3.1.4 Pronunciation as communication

Personal identity issues are also relevant

Because speaking is much more than simply transferring information, people grow into particular manners or styles of speaking which are very much part of their personal identity. Just as most native speakers without a theatrical bent find it awkward to adopt a way of speaking different to their own natural style, so it can seem very 'false' to speak in a style appropriate to another language. This is not a problem if it results in a learner acquiring the new language 'with an accent'. It is a problem if it results in the learner being unable to control the aspects of the new language which are actually information-bearing, as opposed to conveying personal style.

3.2 What learners need

Learners need a communicative method ...

Learners need to be taught pronunciation, as all other aspects of language, in a communicative method. Though communicative methods for teaching vocabulary, grammar and pragmatics have been around for decades, there has been little development of a communicative method for pronunciation teaching. We consider here some aspects of what is involved in a communicative approach to pronunciation.

... not details about the articulation of sounds

Note that one thing learners need is teachers with confidence to assure them that the communicative methods do fulfil their needs. Some learners, themselves subject to the erroneous but common beliefs discussed above, believe that what they need is instruction in the articulation of specific English sounds. Some teachers I interviewed justified a focus on articulation with reference to the learners' desire for this information. While there is nothing wrong with providing the information requested, lessons based mainly on articulation are unlikely to be effective.

3.2.1 Conversation

Learners need lots of real conversation with native speakers

What learners most want (cf. Willing 1993, Volkoff and Golding 1998) - and what will help them most (Kendrick 1997) - is plenty of authentic conversation practice (cf. Burns and Joyce 1997), supplemented by expert guidance on how to understand and correct their mistakes. Teachers can help with strategies for how to initiate and maintain conversation with native speakers outside the classroom, but ultimately this is something that learners have to do themselves. They can be greatly helped or hindered in this by the attitudes of the native speakers with whom they interact. Native speakers who encourage conversation, and are not themselves awkward in cross cultural communication, are one of the biggest boons a learner can have.

3.2.2 Drilling

Learners need practice and repetition of useful phrases

Learners also need considerable drilling and repetition - but this must directly exercise the speech that they will actually use in real life. Old fashioned drilling of sounds and minimal pairs, or more modern practice with chants and tongue twisters, is useful only in so far as it is directly related in the learners' minds with the speech that they will actually use outside the classroom.

3.2.3 Expert guidance

Learners need to change the way they (subconsciously) think about English sounds

Essentially what learners need to do to pronounce a new language in a way that is easily intelligible to its native speakers, is to stop thinking about speech in terms of the categories of their first language, and start thinking about it in terms that are appropriate to the new language. If they can do this, even though the exact realisation of some of the sounds is likely to be a bit 'foreign', their meaning will be evident.

Learners need teachers who understand the different ways that they hear English sounds

Learners are most helped by teachers who themselves can appreciate and imaginatively explore what the sounds seem like to learners, gradually leading them to more appropriate ways of thinking about English pronunciation. Indeed some of the most gifted teachers are probably those who are themselves good at pronunciation, and have an openness to hearing sounds in different ways¹³ discussed above - but this in itself is not enough for teachers. It is also necessary to be able to articulate what one does. This requires understanding of cross-language - as well as English - phonetics and phonology, and of speech perception and production (psycholinguistics). It also requires an ability beyond simple reproduction of this knowledge in technical terms, which are unlikely to be meaningful to learners.

Learners need appropriate, not technical, descriptions of sounds

Where a learner has difficulty in pronouncing specific sounds or sound sequences of English, they need *appropriate* description of how to *think* about the sounds, in terms they can understand and 'latch on to'. They need to be terms based on the way the learner thinks about the sounds, not the way English speakers do.

A variety of 'tricks' can be found for most learners.

¹³ It is this ability that is perhaps the origin of the myth that 'musical talent' is the basis of second language pronunciation skills.

3.2.4 Critical listening

Learners need to listen often to their own speech, with guidance as to good and bad aspects

Learners also need ample opportunity to listen to their own speech and that of fellow learners in comparison with that of native speakers, and to learn to distinguish the aspects of learner pronunciation that make comprehension difficult for NSs. Listening to your own speech as you are speaking is very difficult. So is discussion of particular aspects of the pronunciation of a phrase or sentence which has just disappeared into thin air.

For these reasons it is essential for learners and teachers to work with recorded voices, so that the speech they are discussing is external to both of them, and can be referred to objectively without distortion (of the 'badddduh' type discussed above). Computer technology makes this type of recording and play back extremely easy - yet few of the teachers I interviewed used even the simplest computer sound editors. More used tape recorders, though not always in the most useful ways.

3.3 Conclusion

What learners often get, when they get pronunciation teaching at all (see above), is far from the ideal just outlined. In the next section we look at pronunciation teaching from the teachers' perspective.

4 Current Status: Who gives pronunciation tuition?

4.1 General ESL teachers

As stated above, most tuition in oral communication is given by general English language teachers (as opposed to specialist pronunciation teachers, who will be looked at in the next section). There is considerable movement of individual teachers between the TAFE, AMEP, and ELICOS systems, and in general teachers in these organisations are rather similar in their outlook and characteristics - so they can be treated as one group for the purposes of the present discussion¹⁴.

Difficulties for teachers in all sectors caused by funding constraints

All of these institutions currently operate under tight financial constraints: the AMES has been ****sed, the TAFE system suffers from severe and continuing funding cuts, and ELICOS centres are commercial operations - which, since much of their clientele comes from Asia, suffered greatly in the recent Asian crisis, the effects of which are still being felt.

ESL teachers' dedication and willingness to help learners

The majority of the teachers I interviewed impressed me with their awareness of their students' problems with oral communication, their belief in the importance of pronunciation as a component of language classes, and their willingness to spend time and effort investigating ways to help.

They also impressed me with their frustration at the difficulty of providing effective help for learners, their sense of 'not knowing enough' about the topic, and their expression of the serious constraints of the situation under which they were working.

¹⁴ There may be some qualitative differences in the teachers in the university study skills sector in terms of their background, type of students, research orientation etc, but this was not analysed in any way and is merely an impression. Comments from those teachers are also taken into account in the writing of the present report.

In this section, we look at some of the concerns raised by general ESL teachers with regard to their ability to give effective help with pronunciation to ESL learners.

Poor work conditions

Lack of resources and recognition have led to low morale among many teachers

Language teaching, very unfortunately, is traditionally a rather low status occupation. There are relatively few external rewards for effort, and any career development generally involves moving out of the classroom and into administration. Despite this many language teachers are extremely dedicated and show great concern for their students.

Although language teaching has never been a cushy job, in recent years, the work conditions of many language teachers have deteriorated markedly, with the increased commercial pressure on language teaching organisations. There have been many job losses and considerable increases in the use of casual teachers. Along with this there have been increases in class sizes and in contact hours required of full time teachers, as well as changing demands imposed by integrated training and other innovations of the National Training Framework.

All this means that teachers have little time for professional development, private study or networking, or even for class preparation. Morale and 'willingness to give' have declined in conjunction with these developments.

Lack of opportunity to prioritise ESL pronunciation in language classes

Classes with multiple agendas and mixed student needs make it difficult to teach anything well

I have said above that many language teachers choose not to prioritise pronunciation because they lack confidence and/or skill in teaching this subject. This is by no means the only factor. Many teachers are unable to give the attention to pronunciation that they would like to, due to classes being too large and including too wide a mix of students, the length of courses being too short, and the aims of courses being too diverse - often including literacy and often centring on a 'topic' such as OHS or other training, in line with the move to integrated training - and often including both NSs and NNSs.

Some policy makers I interviewed remarked that teachers needed to adapt more effectively to the new needs for integrated training etc. This is no doubt true; on the other hand, it needs to be recognised that the many recent changes do impose hardship on teachers, and that there is scope for more appropriate assistance to be given with the adjustments that are necessary.

It also needs to be said that some of the changes being implemented are not simply a matter of teachers needing to adapt to new circumstances, but actually make it nearly impossible to be effective. Foremost among these is integrated training that involves NNSs with ESL needs being taught in the same classes as NSs. Another is literacy classes which mix ESL and NS needs.

Mixing language backgrounds in a class is not so bad as mixing NSs and learners.

Please note Contrary to popular belief, it is not mixed *language background* of ESL classes that is critical (indeed it is arguable that ESL classes with learners of mixed language background are preferable to those where all learners share the same native language), although a mix of widely divergent cultures can make classes difficult to run. What is bad is mixing native speakers and ESL learners in the same group. (Of course, NNSs who are proficient in English can easily be mixed

with NSs – its those who still have poor oral communication skills who need to be treated in separate classes.)

Lack of effectiveness of pronunciation teaching methods and materials

Variable methods used in pronunciation teaching

ESL teachers vary widely in the methods they use to teach pronunciation. Some believe strongly in the ‘old school’ methods of drilling sounds, words, and dialogues (Baker 1981). Some prefer to give instruction in the phonological rules of English, including stress placement, spelling to sound rules, intonation patterns, etc, according to a range of different methods (eg. Zawadski 1996, Kenworthy 1987, Bowen and Marks 1992, Carter and McCarthy 1997, Celce-Murcia et al 1996, Rogerson and Gilbert 1990). Others like to work mainly through listening to authentic materials (Burns and Joyce 1997). Still others question the need for explicit instruction on pronunciation at all, and concentrate on giving help with culturally appropriate interactions (cf. Liddicoat and Crozet 1997). Most teachers use a mix of these methods, to suit whatever need they see arising.

Some teachers are unconfident with pronunciation teaching, but interviews with them suggested that many of their methods were very effective. Others are highly confident, but interviews suggested the methods they use may not necessarily be the best.

Little proper testing of the relative effectiveness of methods has been done

The point is that as a discipline, we have little formal knowledge of what methods are best for pronunciation teaching in what contexts. There is a great need for more serious research in this area, as detailed below. Another point is that many of the teachers I interviewed had little knowledge of cross-linguistic phonology or speech perception issues that are highly relevant to pronunciation teaching, and a substantial number of them still subscribe to some of the everyday misconceptions about pronunciation discussed above.

Both of these things need to be remedied if the effectiveness of general ESL pronunciation teaching is to be improved.

4.2 Workplace Trainers

Workplace trainers should not be used for teaching or assessing ESL

One controversial development of the National Training Framework is the increased use of workplace trainers and assessors. These are people from within a workplace who are given training in training and assessment, with Training Packages created by the National Assessors and Workplace Training Body (NAWTB).

There are some concerns about the validity of using such little-trained people for general peer assessment. With respect to the assessment of spoken language skills of ESL learners, it is impossible that such people would be able to give valid assessments. Assessment of spoken language is a highly fraught area even for professionals (more on this below), and the use of such trainers for this purpose should not be condoned.

However, there are potentially important roles for these people - outlined in Recommendations below.

4.3 Pronunciation specialists

For each team of ESL teachers, there is someone who is considered a specialist in pronunciation, to whom learners with specific difficulties are referred, or from whom other teachers seek advice both informally and more formally through workshops and seminars. Some

have even formed interest groups and taken other steps to raise the profile of pronunciation among English teachers, and impress the need for pronunciation teaching on trainers and administrators, as well as disseminating useful strategies to other teachers.

Variable background of 'specialists'

These people are very variable in their backgrounds, and also, to be blunt, in their qualification for the role. I hesitate to be so blunt, because they are dedicated to pronunciation, and put a lot of work into it, often without formal recognition or reward. The situation can be said to be the fault of the system, which has so little regulation in this area, rather than of self-styled specialists, who are very much responding to a need expressed to them by colleagues. Nevertheless, the situation needs improving, hopefully with the cooperation of, and to the advantage of, those who have been working in the area.

Isolation of specialists from one another

Another, related, issue is that these specialists are generally very isolated from one another and receive very little recognition outside their very local area for the work they do. My interviews revealed that there was little networking among those with special interests in pronunciation - a situation which I have tried to improve a little by creation of a webpage¹⁵ and email list.

These specialists fall into three main groups, as follows.

4.3.1 *ESL background*

Little use of communicative methods of pronunciation teaching

Some pronunciation specialists have come up through TESOL training and years of ESL teaching experience, during which they have taken a personal interest in the pronunciation side of their teaching, and undertaken additional formal and/or informal study in this area. The most impressive of these is Halina Zawadski, the widely respected author of *In Tempo*, one of the few specifically Australian pronunciation textbooks, which takes an innovative and generally admired approach to teaching rhythm and intonation.

Other teachers have also created materials which are circulated locally among colleagues (eg. Sainsbury 1996, Widin 1993/4). Some of these are good, and some, it has to be said, are not so good. Even the best of them focus almost entirely on English phonology, and give little attention to some of the issues described in 'Background' above. And even the best of them show little knowledge of developments in phonology and second language pronunciation research. Though language teaching in general has come a long way since the 1950s and 1960s, with major developments in communicative teaching and in the huge field of applied linguistics, as far as pronunciation goes, many teachers, even those who specialise in pronunciation, are very much behind the times. More will be said about this below.

While there are a range of different approaches, and debates about the merits of each, there is little serious research to resolve differences of opinion on methods.

4.3.2 *Speech pathology background*

Speech pathologists have a very different type of training to language teachers, with much more emphasis on physiology and articulation. However, standard speech pathology training takes even

¹⁵ Pronunciation Webpage, <<http://metz.une.edu.au/~hfraser/pronunc.htm>>

Speech pathology training is not sufficient on its own, without ESL training, for helping ESL pronunciation

less cross linguistic perspective than ESL training, and focuses, naturally enough, on the types of pronunciation difficulties native speakers can have, rather than on the psycholinguistics of learning to pronounce a second language.

Since the felt need of many ESL learners and teachers, though this is not the main actual need as explained above, is for more information about the correct articulation of English speech sounds, it is not uncommon for speech pathologists to be asked for help with ESL pronunciation. Indeed this is quite a burgeoning field among speech pathologists. However, without additional training in ESL, which some but by no means all speech pathologists take, it is doubtful that they possess the appropriate knowledge of the problems faced by second language learners - which, though superficially similar to the problems of those with a speech pathology, are really very different, as explained above. The advice teachers need is from people with more, rather than less, knowledge of cross-language phonology and psycholinguistics than themselves.

Need for greater regulation as to who can claim to be a specialist in ESL pronunciation

Alison Winkworth, until recently of the University of Sydney School of Health Sciences, is someone who has a high degree of expertise in both speech pathology and ESL. She and her team have set up useful programs on 'accent modification' for NNSs, particularly of Japanese background, and have also undertaken research in pronunciation teaching and the efficacy of the training they run. She has encouraged students to carry out rigorous evaluations (eg. Lau 1999).

Winkworth herself emphasises the differences between the knowledge needed for speech therapy and that needed for ESL pronunciation work, and is concerned that it is too easy for speech pathologists to be put in the position of 'ESL expert' without any real qualifications in language teaching. For example, to be included in the Private Speech Pathologists Association of NSW's Directory of Members as an ESL specialist, a speech pathologist need only state this as an interest; there is no requirement for an ESL or other relevant qualification. With the growing interest in ESL pronunciation (discussed above), it is tempting for speech pathologists to do this, and Winkworth is actively campaigning for stricter guidelines on the qualifications necessary for someone to advertise themselves as an 'expert'.

4.3.3 'SGAV' practitioners

SGAV is an alternative to overly 'segmental' approaches to pronunciation, which focuses on intonation etc

'SGAV' or the Structuro-Global Audio-Visual method of pronunciation training (eg. Curic 1993) is based on the work of Guberina (eg. 1972) with deaf patients, in Zagreb in the 1960s. SGAV was developed, mainly in France, into a method for use by language teachers who were concerned to increase the emphasis on spoken as opposed to written language. The SGAV method has been used in Australia in the teaching of French to English speakers, but is also favoured by several English language teachers. It is little known outside these circles, in particular not by professional phoneticians and phonologists.

SGAV practitioners see themselves very much in opposition to the old fashioned behaviourist methods of pronunciation teaching, focusing on individual sounds and articulatory drills, which are now replaced in other areas of language teaching with more communicative methods, but are still favoured by some pronunciation teachers.

Main themes of SGAV method

The main themes of the SGAV method are

- focus on the differences between how NSs and learners hear sounds (due to the influence of native language on the perception and conception of sounds).
- focus on perception over production, and a concern with modifying learner's pronunciation through focusing their attention on perception of the aspects of English sounds that are most important in communication.
- focus on dialogue and conversation rather than individual words.
- focus on intonation (prosody) rather than individual sounds.

It should be noted that none of these points is unique to SGAV. Indeed, point 1 is a commonplace of general linguistics, though given too little attention in language teaching. Point 2 is also a well-accepted among serious researchers on second language phonology (cf. Strange 1995), though with important debates regarding the detailed relationship between perception and production. Points 3 and 4 have been well accepted in principle, though not always in practice, among language teachers of a wide range of persuasions, for at least the last decade or two.

Though individual SGAV practitioners are undoubtedly successful in pronunciation teaching, it is not clear exactly how their classroom and teacher training methods relate to the SGAV theory as opposed to all other approaches.

Where SGAV is different to mainstream academic approaches to second language phonology is in the way it articulates and implements these general principles.

SGAV has good insights but would benefit from increased knowledge of modern phonetics and psycholinguistics

Because current SGAV practitioners have little background in modern phonetics and phonology, the terminology and explanations used tend to be arcane and idiosyncratic. Even the original work of Guberina himself is at best quaint by the standards of modern phonetics and phonology.

While SGAV is based on good insights, and has value in countering certain negative aspects of language classes typical of what are now becoming rather outmoded methods, where it is weak is in its understanding of phonetics, phonology and psycholinguistics. The emphasis of some SGAV practitioners on the need for visual representations of speech for learners shows a certain naivety with regard to some of the issues outlined in the 'Background' section above.

Need for cooperation between SGAV and other approaches

Despite this weakness, SGAV practitioners have been active in carrying out useful research on oral communication, and their interest and experience can be expected to make a valuable contribution to a cooperative push to increase and improve the pronunciation component of ESL teaching in all contexts, based on academically rigorous and testable work - see Recommendations below.

4.4 Why is pronunciation so difficult to teach?

Many teachers are unconfident with teaching pronunciation

It is not clear that pronunciation teaching is inherently extraordinarily difficult - though of course it has its challenges - if the conditions are right.

What is certainly clear is that many teachers do find pronunciation very difficult to teach, and consider that their teacher training gave them

an insufficient basis to work from (Brown 1992, Claire 1993). It is worth pausing here for a little background on the recent history of language teaching and teacher training (cf Celce-Murcia et al 1996).

Post-war
behaviouristic
methods
emphasised
pronunciation

In the post-war boom in English language teaching during the 1950s and 1960s, there was a huge focus on pronunciation - in the form of behaviouristic drilling of sound contrasts and word pairs, with a strong emphasis on the articulation of individual sounds, and little attention to rhythm and intonation, the construction of useful sentences, or the practice of realistic conversations. These were the days of the strict phonemic description of English, of contrastive analysis, and of 'transfer' as an explanation of foreign accents.

Later
communicative
methods rejected
behaviourism - and
with it,
pronunciation

This approach came into disfavour in the 1970s with the development of communicative methods. From then on, the focus was on communication and the use of language in real situations. This was in general a good thing, but it had one unfortunate side effect - the almost complete ignoring of pronunciation. Pronunciation was so strongly associated with the 'drill and kill' methods that it was deliberately downplayed, rather than being incorporated into the communicative method. The result was that few if any 'communicative pronunciation' methods were developed. Phonetics and phonology courses were gradually dropped from many teacher training programs, and pronunciation was, in general¹⁶, covered briefly if at all.

Recent swing back
to acknowledge
need for
pronunciation
teaching - but new
methods needed to
tie in with
communicative
teaching

Of course, some teachers and teacher educators remained highly aware of the need for pronunciation in communication, and continued to teach it - with a combination of the old methods and their own personal adjustments and additions, and, in some cases, training in academic phonetics and phonology. Some of these people are now justly bemused by the sudden interest in something they have been doing all along.

Over the last ten years or more, the pendulum has been swinging back, and there has been a gradual increase in interest in pronunciation, which is now reaching a crescendo internationally¹⁷, as people acknowledge the importance of pronunciation to learners' experience of their new language, and to their progress in other aspects of language learning: those who can talk easily can increase their practice far more effectively than those who cannot.

Most phonology
for language
teachers is English
phonology, not
cross language
phonology

Unfortunately by this time, knowledge of second language phonology and pronunciation teaching was relatively scarce in the ESL community.

Many teachers and teacher educators understandably turned to phonetics and phonology to learn more about pronunciation. Again unfortunately, the information found there was not ideal (for reasons to be given in the next section). Though there has been a surge of books to interpret the facts of phonological theory and the description of English phonology for teachers (Pennington 1996, Morley 1994,

¹⁶ Though with notable exceptions - cf Ruth Nicholls' work in UNE's TESOL courses.

¹⁷ The recent TESOL-2000 conference in Vancouver, one of the major annual TESOL events with attendance in the order of 10,000, reported a vastly increased interest in pronunciation, with a range of initiatives in pronunciation teaching showcased, and all pronunciation sessions packed. Similarly, the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) in the UK reports significantly increased interest in pronunciation. This increasing interest is greatly helped by the coordinating work of a few individuals with a long standing interest in pronunciation, notably Judy Gilbert.

Yallop 1995, Hannahs and Young-Scholten 1997), and a gradual increase in the number of TESOL courses in phonology and pronunciation¹⁸, unfortunately, most of the focus is on English phonetics and phonology, with disproportionately little attention to cross language comparisons and psycholinguistics.

4.5 Research environment

Academic phonetics and phonology have until recently done very little on second language pronunciation

Teachers with an interest in and concern about pronunciation naturally turn to academic phonetics and phonology for further information, through textbooks or coursework. Those who do so are often disappointed. Academic phonetics, phonology and psycholinguistics have traditionally taken very little interest in second language phonology, and even less in practical pronunciation teaching - for a range of reasons. Most work in these areas has been highly theoretical, and where it has been 'practical', it has been in the area of application to computer environments, much more than to human learning.

Academic work is relevant but needs to be applied carefully

The application of phonological knowledge to pronunciation issues is in fact much more problematic than is often realised, so it is not the case that information in phonology textbooks and journals can be easily assimilated and made relevant to pronunciation teaching. This is one case where the term 'applied linguistics' is not a good one - pronunciation does not require simply application of existing theoretical knowledge in a practical area. It requires theory development of its own (cf. Theo van Lier's similar point at the 1999 meeting of the Australian Association of Applied Linguistics).

Recent upsurge of academic interest in second language pronunciation

Over the last decade or so, however there has been, internationally, a serious upsurge of interest among academics in the area of second language phonology (SLP), driven partly by an interest in psycholinguistics and theory of speech, and partly by a need to know more about how to teach pronunciation to learners of a second language (not necessarily English), eg. James and Leather (1997), Major (1998), articles in *Language Learning* and *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* journals.

This work needs to be better known - and extended - in Australia

This work is all but unknown among ESL teachers and researchers in Australia - and indeed it is not clear that learning about it directly would help. The information needs to be interpreted for classroom applicability, and then imparted to teachers. In this country there are few people willing and able to do this¹⁹, mainly due to the low numbers of academic phoneticians in general.

Nevertheless, teacher training and professional development need to take these developments, as well as background information from phonetics, phonology and psycholinguistics, into account. Teachers need a greater appreciation of the pronunciation difficulties faced by learners of ESL and the reasons for these difficulties, and a simple framework for understanding the situation of the second language learner.

¹⁸ As examples, the University of Technology Sydney has a 'Pronunciation and Phonology' course (designed by Ross Forman) specifically for its trainee teachers; Macquarie University encourages trainee teachers to take a phonetics and phonology option with a component on second language pronunciation.

¹⁹ Notable exceptions are John Ingram of University of Queensland, and Michael Carey, of Macquarie University. Duncan Markham, briefly at Deakin University, has now returned to the UK.

Some encouraging developments, but need for much more

Rigorous professional academic work in pronunciation needs to be expanded and developed. There are some encouraging developments eg. a new collaborative research program between the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) and the AMEP is paying more attention to pronunciation than previously. It is hoped that this will include appreciation of the importance of an understanding of speech perception, cross-language phonology and the effects that learning a language and a writing system can have on the way people perceive speech sounds.

4.6 Conclusion

There are many reasons why the teaching of ESL pronunciation is currently less than optimally effective, and certainly it is wrong to blame any one group, whether teachers, pronunciation specialists, or academics. I believe it is possible to develop methods which are much more consistently effective than the ones in general use at the moment. Second language pronunciation is a topic of great theoretical interest and practical relevance, which unfortunately has been out of fashion for some decades. It seems likely that a few well-publicised interesting developments would help to swing this topic back into fashion among a range of people with relevant skills and interests, and put Australia in a position to contribute impressively to world wide developments in this area.

5 Analysis

I hope I have shown that the situation for ESL learners with respect to getting the help they need with pronunciation is rather serious: certainly, my interviews revealed widespread acknowledgment of the problems outlined above. I hope also that the complexity of the situation is apparent from the account given above.

This section provides a little more detail on some of the main factors that contribute to the current situation, and also raises one that has not yet been discussed fully - the issue of the assessment of pronunciation. The following section presents recommendations for a range of initiatives which might help to improve the situation.

5.1 Prioritisation of oral communication in training

There have been many changes in the VET system, as well as considerable privatisation and funding cuts. Much as one might like to advocate intensive pronunciation lessons for all, the reality is that those who hold the purse strings must be convinced of the advantages before they can be expected to part with funds. In the current situation, this includes employers, employer organisations, and government agencies.

Industry is aware of the problems of poor oral communication skills among ESL workers

My interviews with representatives of several ITABs, as well as with teachers who supply workplace language tuition, convinced me that employers are well aware of the problems for themselves, as well as their workers, of poor pronunciation skills among their NNS employees. After all, oral communication underlies an enormous number of the competencies of virtually all training packages - certainly everything to do with client communication, internal reporting, meetings, phone calls etc.

Even so, employers are yet to be convinced of the benefits to their industries of improving workers' pronunciation. There is an

They need to be convinced of the likelihood of improvement flowing from expenditure

unfortunate tendency for the learners themselves to get the blame for their 'lack' in this area, and very little recognition of either the value of speakers of foreign languages to the workplace and to society as a whole, or the 'lack' of many Australians in their inability to deal with speakers of other languages, either through knowledge of foreign languages, or through sensitivity to the communication needs of ESL speakers.

Strategies are needed to increase awareness among employers and others of the value of training ESL workers in oral communication, and of the contribution that non native speakers can make to the workplace. It seems that if this value, which is a very real one²⁰, were more apparent to employers and funders, they would be more willing to expend time and money on it. After all, in cases where the commercial value of cross-cultural communication skills and ability to converse with NNSs is clearly seen, for example in the hospitality industry, training is certainly made available.

However, perhaps the problem could be more accurately stated as 'employers are yet to be convinced of the likelihood of benefits flowing from expenditure on particular types of workplace training initiatives'. And indeed, there is a sense in which they are right to be sceptical about the value of spending money and time on ESL provision in the hope that it will improve workers' oral communication skills. Pronunciation tuition is less than fully effective in the absence of specialist teaching skills and favourable teaching circumstances. As we have seen, learners' chances of encountering such tuition and circumstances are not as high as one would like even in an ESL class, let alone in a more general LLN program.

5.2 LLN policy

ESL and oral communication have been subsumed under 'literacy', to the disadvantage of both

On the other hand, employers and others *have* gradually been convinced of the benefits of proper attention to literacy - partly through encouragement to comply with a range of policies and practices based on sound research. It is unfortunate that these developments have not also included attention to oral communication.

In the current situation, many people whose need is primarily for ESL pronunciation work are placed in literacy classes (cf Mitchell 1999, Hammond and Derewianka 1999) - despite the fact that the literacy skills of migrants are on average higher than their speaking skills (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999). This mixing of classes has had poor results for both literacy and oral communication outcomes (Rosa McKenna, personal communication).

The focus on literacy in LLN policy has not so much marginalised ESL learners, as subsumed them - with the effect that it can appear from LLN statistics that their needs are being met when in fact they are not.

What is required is for ESL needs, and in particular oral communication needs of ESL learners, to be given the same degree of coordinated attention as literacy has had.

²⁰ VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999:420 quote a study which suggests that 'if, on average immigrants were as skilled in English as those born in Australia, the GDP at the end of the 1980s would have been approximately \$750 million higher'. It is not clear that this is the best way of looking at the situation, but it does give a quotable statistic which may be indicative of something.

5.3 Policy research

The very lack of policy research with which to demonstrate the situation of ESL learners is a symptom of problem.

Policy research on 'NESB' has not sufficiently distinguished the needs of those with poor English language skills

Although there has been research on the equity status of NESB people, the subset of NESBs who are NNSs must be more specifically identified and have their needs more adequately met (cf Golding and Volkoff 1999:254).

There is an urgent need for a detailed study of the extent and nature of the problems faced by NNSs and those who interact with them. Based on the present research it can be confidently predicted that such a study would show that oral communication skills are a fundamental requirement, but that NNSs are given woefully inadequate assistance in acquiring it.

5.4 ESL teachers

By no means, however, are the problems with ESL pronunciation confined to policy issues, as shown by the fact that pronunciation teaching outcomes are no better in the private sector than in the public sector.

The skills of ESL teachers in effective pronunciation methods need to be improved

There is also an urgent need to improve the skills of ESL teachers with pronunciation, and the methods and materials available to them,

Teachers generally have a healthy scepticism for abstract theory that is not of direct relevance to their practice. However some aspects of theory are highly relevant to classroom interactions - especially those that help teachers to overcome the incorrect 'commonsense' views referred to above. There is a great need for increased dialogue between teachers and researchers - but achieving this requires a degree of compromise and effort on both sides.

I believe strongly that there is scope for development of a more practical, and more rigorous, communicative approach to pronunciation teaching.

5.5 Pronunciation research

The teachers' problems, in turn, can be related to the particular historical context in which second language research finds itself. For all the reasons explained above, pronunciation has not benefited as it should have from the development of communicative methods of teaching, or from advances in the disciplines of phonetics and psycholinguistics.

There needs to be more systematic research on ESL pronunciation and pronunciation teaching methods

There is a discipline specifically tailored to the needs of second language pronunciation acquisition - one which draws on insights not only from education but from phonetics and phonology, and also from psycholinguistics, comparative linguistics, and the study of writing systems. This discipline is in its infancy, but internationally has been developing very rapidly over the last decade.

Teachers and other practitioners have a real opportunity to influence the development of this discipline in Australia, by making sure it is kept firmly on a practical, as well as theoretical, path, and by offering the many challenges of down to earth observation to abstract theorising.

A number of good developments need to be coordinated and built upon

A significant number of developments show the burgeoning of a serious interest in pronunciation in this country: the institution of new and better pronunciation components in TESOL courses, the creation of materials for teachers and learners, postgraduate research on ESL, to name a few (some specifics are given in Section 9, and References).

These developments need to be built upon and expanded, and great advantages can be expected from a serious attitude to coordination and cooperation in this area.

5.6 Assessment and diagnosis issues

An assessment tool for ESL pronunciation is an obvious need - yet surprisingly, none exists

Assessment of learners' pronunciation is a topic which came up frequently in my interviews - due to my surprise at the lack of any standard tools for use specifically in assessing ESL pronunciation. On the one hand it seems obvious that a range of assessment tools is necessary - as a diagnostic tool for deciding who needs pronunciation tuition, what kind and at what level, and for tracking the progress of learners through a course; and as a research tool for comparing the effectiveness of various methods or approaches to pronunciation teaching in various contexts.

There are some dangers associated with the use of an assessment tool - opportunities for discrimination, etc

On the other hand, many people were at pains to point out the dangers associated with assessment tools. Some of the concerns raised include the following:

- scores on a test can be used as a means of (further) discrimination against NNSs, and can further enhance a deficit model²¹ of learners situation
- formal testing can act as a barrier to good classroom relations between teachers and learners
- some forms of pre- and post-testing can show apparently poor rates of improvement in pronunciation, due to the slow nature of this kind of learning, and while this should not be taken to suggest that the tuition is ineffective, it may be used as a reason to cut further training
- the lack of appropriate assessment tools, and the extreme difficulty of devising a pronunciation test that is valid, fair and reliable

All these issues are real enough, but the solution is not to abandon consideration of assessment. As one group of teachers concluded after heated discussion of this issue: it is time this issue was taken out of the too-hard basket.

Let us look now briefly at some of the assessment tools that are available:

Some existing methods of assessing pronunciation

- competencies, as used in the various TPs and the NRS are in many cases not suited to these types of learners and learning situations
- tests like CSWE, ASLPR and IELTS are not well suited to workplace use, are very demanding of assessors' time and skill, and do not measure pronunciation specifically or objectively²²
- the commercially available tool, 'Clear Speak', is simply bad

²¹ That is, an ascription of the problem of communication to a lack in the speaker - as opposed to a view which sees those who are learning a second language as having more skills than the monolingual interlocutor.

²² These standard tests are based on teachers having a conversation with a learner and scoring the learner's speech on a variety of scales. They are useful for their purposes but not specific or objective enough for detailed work on pronunciation.

- student satisfaction ratings, which is the de facto main method of assessing courses, are useful indicators but not reliable
- learner self-assessment, which is the basis of census data and the LSIA is useful but not calibrated

We need a range of assessment tools - developed with the dangers above in mind

Clearly what is needed is development of new tests. Unfortunately this has been considered prohibitively difficult due to the complexity of what is to be measured. However I believe it is possible and necessary to create useful and sensitive tests. And also that their use might relieve rather than exacerbate some of the problems raised above. For example, formal assessment, if sensitively and appropriately done, could actually help improve learners' confidence - which is often lower than the person's actual skills suggest²³ (Volkoff and Golding 1998:27).

6 Recommendations

The problem is complex and requires a range of planned and coordinated solutions

Due to the recent history of the reform of language, literacy and numeracy training, and also to the longer history of ESL teaching, in which, as documented above, pronunciation has been neglected both in TESOL training and in ESL teaching - there is a need for a multi-pronged, concerted effort to improve the situation of NNSs with pronunciation problems. This is not a 'quick-fix' situation - but it is one where a well-planned program could bring about significant change, which in turn would bring about serious improvements in workplace and other environments.

6.1 Help for learners

6.1.1 Research on the extent and effects of oral communication problems

There is considerable anecdotal and observational evidence from all sectors of the ESL and VET community that adult ESL learners with pronunciation problems are disadvantaged, and that their chances of receiving effective help with English pronunciation through their ESL training are much lower than would be considered desirable.

However there is very little hard evidence of the nature and extent of the problems faced by these people. The best evidence is that provided by the LSIA conducted by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, and that is not ideally suited for extraction of the types of information needed for LLN policy.

We need more data on the extent and effects of NNS (not NESB) oral communication problems

The first recommendation therefore is that some serious hard facts be gathered in regard to this the pronunciation training needs of immigrants.

This means

- identifying NNSs as a subset of NESB people
- measuring the size of this subset in various sectors of society
- identifying the subset of NNSs with problems specifically in the area of pronunciation
- measuring the size of this subset in various sectors of society
- identifying the problems faced by this subset

²³ An issue that needs to be taken into account in using statistics based on learner self-assessment.

- identifying the help provided for this subset
- tracking the effectiveness of this help in improving the situation of this subset
- identifying possible ways of improving any non-optimal aspects of the situation

Note that fully achieving this means prior creation of an effective, objective and simple assessment tool for identifying those with pronunciation problems. Despite the doubts raised by my interviewees, and discussed above, there is no reason why this cannot be done. However it is a task which requires time and analysis; a hastily devised tool is unlikely to be effective. It should be carried out by someone skilled in survey research but in close consultation with someone who has a good understanding of the nature of second language pronunciation, and also with someone who understands the situation of learners and can incorporate suitable safeguards against any harm to them in terms of equity or discrimination.

6.1.2 Improvements to the system of identifying ESL pronunciation problems

A major problem uncovered in the present study is the inadequate matching of learners who have oral communication problems with teachers who can assist them in overcoming these problems.

The system of allocating NNSs to training in VET contexts needs to be improved so that they can get specific help with their specific problems - before going on to other training

The second recommendation of this report therefore is that this system must be improved. NNS learners with problems related specifically to pronunciation should be able to be identified and placed in classes with a teacher who can provide effective help for these problems (whether that help is generic, or integrated with a particular type of workplace training - see Section 6.2.3) *before* they are given other kinds of training. It is likely that a relatively short, intensive program would be more effective, in terms that matter to employers and funding agencies as much as to learners themselves, than a series of half-hearted classes which cut corners by combining types of training that just do not go together.

Again, there is the issue of assessment: obviously, in order to place learners with the right teacher, they must first be diagnosed correctly, and this clearly requires some type of assessment procedure - unless classes are to be provided to volunteers (and note that all the indications are that if volunteers were called for pronunciation tuition there would be a huge take-up).

However, the assessment in this case need not be formal or objective, and can be done with the cooperation of the learner, allowing them choice in the type of training they receive, as already done under the Mutual Obligations system. Fitzpatrick et al (1999) have already provided excellent guidelines on how to assess the needs of jobseekers, and identify those with specific ESL pronunciation problems, which can undoubtedly be adapted for workplace contexts. The issue is what happens to the learners (such as Fitzpatrick et al's 'Quon') who are assessed as having ESL oral communication needs. They need to be in classes which focus specifically on ESL oral communication.

6.1.3 Creation of guidelines for multilingual workplaces

It has been explained above that one of the main needs of ESL learners seeking to improve their oral communication skills, apart from effective pronunciation lessons, is increased opportunities to converse

Guidelines for multilingual workplaces should accompany training packages so as to increase the opportunities of learners to speak with NSs

with native speakers. This could be provided relatively easily for those in employment, through workplace policies which encouraged cross-cultural communication - an initiative which would have a number of benefits for NSs as well, but specifically would greatly improve the lot of ESL learners (cf. Sanguinetti 2000)

The third recommendation therefore is the creation of a set of guidelines for multilingual workplaces, to be worked up into an endorsed component of a Training Package, including materials for both trainers and learners, which could be administered by workplace trainers with relatively low levels of special expertise. The extent to which these can be generic or should be specific to each industry needs to be investigated.

Such materials should *not* include guidelines for assessment or tuition in pronunciation, which should only be done by qualified professionals. Nor should they replace formal expert tuition – they are a supplement, not a substitute for pronunciation classes. However they should include guidelines for systems which could be put in place in any workplace, including

- allocation of time for informal communication between NSs and NNSs
- institution of one on one ‘buddy systems’ between NSs and NNSs
- training for NSs in how to communicate with NNSs, and in culturally sensitive communication

Easy-to-implement, low-cost initiatives along these lines are sure to have very beneficial effects on productivity and workplace relations, which, if documented, would be useful in convincing other employers of the advantages of using this scheme.

These materials should be created by a team of experienced ESL teachers, in consultation with workplace trainers and employers, as well as a pronunciation expert.

6.2 Help for teachers

The above simple recommendations can be expected to improve the lot of ESL learners considerably. There is no doubt however that the best thing that could be done for NNS learners with significant pronunciation problems is to improve the level of skill and confidence among general language teachers in dealing with these problems. This is more complex to implement, and is the topic of this section.

The various reasons for the general lack of confidence among teachers in dealing with specific pronunciation problems of learners, and its effects, have been analysed in some detail above. In this section, I consider some solutions to the problem, which could be implemented over the medium term.

6.2.1 Improved training for teachers

Increased training should be available for teachers in how to teach pronunciation

Existing teachers should be able to receive professional development in pronunciation teaching (on a voluntary but properly funded basis), and trainee teachers should receive such tuition as part of their TESOL courses.

Currently pronunciation inservicing happens on a very ad hoc basis, when someone is available who claims knowledge in this area, and as we have seen coverage of pronunciation in TESOL courses is

very variable. Teachers have received a range of different stories from different pronunciation specialists. There is a need for a more coordinated approach.

There should be a conference in order to decide issues of method etc so that teachers can get a unified picture

It is recommended that there should be a conference of people interested in the area of ESL pronunciation²⁴ to discuss a range of issues. It seems likely that it would be possible to integrate a range of existing practices, including the insights of the SGAV approach, into a coordinated approach to pronunciation teaching, or at least to identify opposing schools of thought which can be articulated and evaluated so as to allow teachers and teacher trainers to choose which they wish to adhere to.

Following this, there can be a coordinated program of materials development and research.

6.2.2 Provision of materials and courseware for teachers and learners

There is a need for much more material for both teachers and learners. Computer based materials, with audio, are ideal for pronunciation

The lack of suitable materials for teachers, teacher trainers and learners has been commented on at several points above. Though there are some highly commendable materials, there is need for much more to cover the wide range of needs. Ideally this should be based on a sound foundation of well-documented research on 'what works' in pronunciation teaching.

Computer disks are particularly well suited as a medium for imparting information about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching, and are also a useful way of upskilling teachers and learners in computer use. Of course there will always be a place for written materials.

It would be good to develop some informal endorsement scheme, whereby books and computer disks which adhered to basic principles of linguistics and language teaching could be easily distinguished from those that do not - as an aid to learners and other consumers. It would also be good to publicise information in the media about what sorts of materials are helpful and why. This would serve useful functions of gradually dispelling myths, and attracting students and scholars in related fields to the topic of pronunciation.

6.2.3 Increased research on pronunciation teaching methodology

Research is needed to develop some useful assessment tools

It will be clear that there is a burning need for an increase in the amount of serious research at all levels into a wide range of issues to do with ESL pronunciation teaching.

The first priority is development of a range of assessment tools to allow methods and policies to be assessed for their effectiveness. Note that this is a separate issue from the assessment of workers or other learners - see Section 5.6. While the reasons people have for opposing the objective assessment of learners' pronunciation are appreciated, it is really impossible to improve a system that allows no proper benchmarking or analysis.

With an appropriate assessment tool, an early priority would be a set of benchmarking studies, to provide answers to such questions as

²⁴ Note that I have planned a half day workshop entitled 'Issues and Research Directions in ESL Pronunciation Teaching: Exchanging ideas and coordinating efforts' for the Australian Linguistics Institute in Melbourne on 7 July 2000. More information is available from the ALI webpage: <<http://www.ali.unimelb.edu.au/>>

Then research is needed to determine the most effective methods of teaching pronunciation

Empirical questions should be addressed with empirical methods, not opinion

'How much improvement is possible, or realistic, to expect from a pronunciation class over a given period?'. Next a series of studies should investigate the relative effectiveness of different methods and materials with different types of learners (cf. Macdonald et al 1994, Munro and Derwing 1995).

An early opportunity should be taken to investigate empirically a range of questions which are the topic of debate among teachers, but have never been properly tested, such as: is it better to focus on teaching stressed syllables before teaching unstressed syllables; is it better to represent pronunciation for learners with symbols of the international phonetic alphabet, or with ordinary English spelling conventions. Similarly, experiments to investigate the relative effects of common pronunciation errors on average Australian English listeners would allow proper planning of pronunciation curricula.

One particular issue that needs urgently to be addressed is that of the relationship between generic pronunciation tuition and integrated training. As outlined above, there is some inconsistency about the relationship between these - on the one hand there is a call for integrated training to provide workers with the specific skills needed in their job. On the other there is a call for generic skills development, allowing employers to hire highly adaptable staff. On the face of it, it would seem that pronunciation would be an ideal candidate for generic training, as improved oral communication skills in one area are very likely to translate into improvements in other areas. It would be useful to demonstrate this - as part of a more general demonstration of the value of ESL pronunciation training to the workplace.

7 The current research: what was done

This project involved me spending three weeks in each of Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, which I did in Aug-Sept 99, Oct-Nov 99 and Dec 99 respectively. While there, I interviewed as many people as possible who were engaged in ESL teaching, TESOL teaching, government VET policy and research. Details of the people consulted are provided below, along with my thanks to them. I also conducted a number of seminars and workshops, mainly with ESL teachers, in order to benefit from some group discussion.

During the time I was working on the project I also visited Perth and Townsville on separate business, and took the opportunity to speak to relevant people in those places as well.

Over the last few years I have also been in touch with TESOL teachers in the Faculty of Education, University of New England, Armidale, and have worked closely with teachers at the Language Training Centre, UNE.

The present report summarises and condenses the information I gained from this research. Further details of interviews and workshops are available on request.

The project also involved me in creating a CD-ROM for learners (and teachers) of ESL pronunciation. Further details on this are provided below.

8 The Computer disk

As mentioned above, there are a number of interactive computer disks for ESL learners on the market. Most of these²⁵ are produced by computer experts rather than language teachers, and incorporate a number of ineffective gimmicks. The most prominent of these gimmicks is the use of speech waves, purportedly to help learners visualise their speech and compare it to the speechwave of a NS model. As explained above, however, speechwaves and diagrams of the articulation of the sounds are of little direct use to learners, and can be a barrier to understanding, engendering feelings of confusion and despair.

What is much more important to learners than *seeing* speech, is learning to *hear* it appropriately.

As part of the present project, an interactive computer disk (CD-ROM) has been created to trial several ideas about pronunciation teaching. It is called *Learn to Speak Clearly in English* and is intended for lower intermediate adult ESL learners, in a workplace rather than an academic context. It is expected that the disk would be used first with a teacher and then as self access. It includes paperwork to allow feedback on the success of the various components, and the intention is to use this feedback in development of more extensive materials.

The disk has four modules, with the following rationale (further detail in Section 3 above). More information is available on the pronunciation website referred to above.

Module 1 Communication

This is intended to focus learners' attention on the communicative rather than 'oral gymnastics' aspects of pronunciation. Videos demonstrate the value of speaking slowly, and monitoring the listener's understanding. Exercises invite users to think about their own speech in terms of what an English listener needs in order to understand a spoken message, and to consider their own experience of listening to foreigners speaking their language.

Module 2 Sentence stress

This emphasises the importance to English listeners of having the important (ie. unpredictable) words in a sentence identified by 'louder' pronunciation. It gives learners practice in identifying important words in sentences, and in hearing the difference between stressed and unstressed words (often a major difficulty for NNSs).

Module 3 Pronunciation tips

This starts by continuing the work on stress down to the level of the word, and again emphasises the importance to English listeners of hearing the correct syllable stress in the important words in sentences. It gives practice in hearing and producing syllable stress. This module also gives some guidance on how to identify which aspects of individual sounds are important to English listeners - and, acknowledging that the user's concept of which sounds are 'the same'

²⁵ There are projects in progress that are likely to produce much more effective material (eg. a pronunciation CD by Protea to complement their other highly respected ESL materials, a disk based on Michael Carey's PhD research on Korean accented English).

or 'different' is likely to be quite different to that of the English native speaker, gives practice in the English way of hearing.

Module 4 Critical listening

One of the key aspects of a communicative approach to pronunciation teaching, as explained above, is that learners need to change their way of interpreting sounds, from a way appropriate to their native language, to a way appropriate to English. This section of the disk enables learners to develop their skill in listening to English like NSs do. They hear examples of learners' pronunciation, and have to judge whether a NS would consider it 'correct' or 'incorrect'. They then receive feedback on their judgement and have the opportunity to record their own voice for comparison with the prerecorded learner and an NS model.

9 People consulted

In Canberra

Name		Position
Rob	Atkinson	DETYA - WELL Program
Annie	Bartlett	Second language and international adviser, Study Skills Centre, ANU. Author of: 'Preparing students for graduate study'
John	Carter	Secretary, Senate VET Enquiry
Fiona	Cotton	Private pronunciation teacher. Works for ANU and ADFA. President of ACTATESOL. Runs pronunciation interest group.
Joseph	de Riva O'Phelan	Consultant on language education issues
Patricia	Fowler	Teacher at Canberra Institute of Technology.
Catherine	Gyngell	DETYA - Director of Adult Literacy Policy and Programs Section
Andrew	Lian	Professor at University of Canberra, School of Education Interested in SGAV method in teaching of French and other languages
Bronwen	Macnamara	School of Languages and International Education, University of Canberra. Earlier Masters thesis on assessment of oral communication
Laraine	Morris	Head of Primary Program and lecturer in lang education, School of Teacher Education, University of Canberra
David	Osborne	Dept of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, LSIA
Margie	Sainsbury	Private pronunciation teacher. Works for Home Tutor Scheme and CIT. Author of <i>Basic Pronunciation Teaching Skills</i>
Margaret	Tong	Private pronunciation tutor. Speech pathology and ESL background. Works for Anutech.
Kam Wan	Tsim	Masters student of TESOL in the University of Canberra, interested in teaching English to Chinese learners
Doreen	Wapshere	Head of Department, ESL: Employment and Study Canberra Institute of Technology
Sue	Wharton	Lecturer in TESL at Canberra University
Kate	Wilson	Head, Academic Support Program School of Languages and International Education University of Canberra

In Sydney

Name		Position
Alex	Barthel	Director and Senior Lecturer, English Language and Study Skills Assistance Centre, University of Technology, Sydney. Interested in SGAV method
Kath	Brandon	Australian Centre for Languages, Sydney
Anne	Burns	Lecturer at NCELTR. Author of 'Focus on Speaking'.
Michael	Carey	PhD student at Macquarie. Contributor to Macquarie TESOL program. Runs 'Correct Me' service for ESL students.
Stephanie	Claire	NSW AMES. Thesis on pronunciation teaching. interested in SGAV method. Creating video to help teachers assess pronunciation in CSWE.
Christine	Erskine	NSW Dept of Education
Ross	Forman	Senior Lecturer in TESOL at University of Technology Sydney. Has developed a full distance mode course on 'Pronunciation and phonology' for UTS.
Linda	Hand	Lecturer, School of Communication Disorders University of Sydney
Sam	Johnson	NSW Dept of Education
Tess	Julian	NAWTB
Trish	Gamper	NAWTB
Joan	Masters	Director of AMES NSW
Jeannette	McGregor	Graduate student in ESL pronunciation at NCELTR
Julius	Pfull	Department of Education and Training, NSW
Tanya	Roddan	ESL teacher at Star City casino
Peter	Roger	PhD student and ESL teacher at NCELTR
Kimiko	Tsukada	Recent PhD on Japanese accented English, Macquarie
Diane	Warwick	Program Manager ESOL ACCESS Educational Services Division, Ashfield Now retired
Alison	Winkworth	Lecturer School of Communication Sciences & Disorders University of Sydney
Halina	Zawadski	Works for AMES and does private pronunciation tutoring. Author of 'In Tempo'

In Melbourne

Name		Position
Jill	Bamforth	Teacher at AMES Melbourne, developing new pronunciation curriculum
Belinda	Bold	Victoria University of Technology, and ALMITAB
Bev	Cox	Teacher at WorkCom in Melbourne
Lynn	Fitzpatrick	Commet (VET consultancy)
Ray	Fogolyan	Health and Safety ITAB, Melbourne
Maggie	Gundit	Teacher at WorkCom in Melbourne
Jan	Hagston (Kindler)	Manager, Research, Curriculum and Professional Services Unit, Language Australia
Julie	Hawkey	Teacher at WorkCom in Melbourne
Anne	Isaac	Study skills teacher at Melbourne University. Developed for-credit ESL courses at MU. Interested in SGAV method. Video on 'The Rhythm of Language', with Jane Orton
Heather	Kaufman	Manager of Protea software company, currently bringing out a CD on pronunciation
Giselle	Ketts	Study skills teacher at Monash University
Shem	Macdonald	Teacher at La Trobe language centre. Doing an MEd on pronunciation at La Trobe
Rosa	McKenna	Commet (VET consultancy)
Tim	Murphy	Teacher at Monash University English Language Centre
Meg	Rosse	Private pronunciation teacher in Melbourne. Language and Academic Skills unit at Latrobe University
Laura	Tollfree	Phonetician at Monash, background in ESL teaching and speech pathology
Liz	Turner	Teacher at WorkCom in Melbourne
Veronica	Volkoff	RMIT, VET research
Philippa	Thomas-Walsh	Workplace Learning Initiatives
Louise	Wignall	Workplace Communication Group, ANTA
Lynda	Yates	Coordinator, Graduate Diploma in TESOL, La Trobe University

Other

Name		Position
Allison	Brown	Author of 'Survey of Attitudes and Practices Related to Pronunciation Teaching'. Now lecturing in educational design at UQld
Beverley	Campbell	ALNARC
Charles	Clennell	University of South Australia
Leanne	Goldsworthy	ESL teacher to Aboriginal schools, Northern Territory
John	Ingram	Lecturer at University of Queensland, researches in area of second language phonology
Gwen	Johnson	NSW Dept of Education, formerly Regional Literacy Coordinator, New England and North West
Margaret	Jones	Director of Studies, UWA CELT
Kylie	Luciano	A/Education Manager, Yatala Labour Prison
Mehtap	Kocatepe	PhD student at James Cook University
Duncan	Markham	Researcher on foreign accent and second language phonology, formerly at Deakin University
Ruth	Nicholls	TESOL lecturer with longstanding specialisation in pronunciation, UNE; thesis on intonation
Dave	Norman	Assistant Director of Studies, UWA CELT
Annette	Rogers	ESL teacher

10 References

Note It would hardly have been possible to complete this project without access to the many excellent websites maintained especially by government departments.

- Australian Council for Adult Literacy. (undated) 'Surveys and Beyond: The case for adult literacy'. ACAL website
- Australian National Training Authority. 1998. *A Bridge to the Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003*. Brisbane: Australian National Training Authority
- Australian National Training Authority. 1998. *Achieving Equitable Outcomes: A supporting paper to Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training*. Brisbane: Australian National Training Authority
- Australian National Training Authority. 1999. *A New Assessment Tool: Information kit for assessors and workplace trainers on incorporating language, literacy and numeracy skills into Training Packages*. Melbourne: Australian National Training Authority
- Australian National Training Authority. 1999. *Built In Not Bolted On*. Melbourne: Australian National Training Authority
- Australian National Training Authority. 1999. *Process for Training Package Development*. Melbourne: Australian National Training Authority
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 1997. *Aspects of Literacy: Assessed skill levels, Australia 1996*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Baker, A. 1981. *Ship or sheep?: An intermediate pronunciation course (2nd edition)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Bartlett, A., Holzknicht, S. and Cunningham, A. 1999. *Hit the Ground Running: Preparing students for graduate study*. Canberra: Asia-Pacific Press
- Beebe, L. 1987. 'Myths about interlanguage phonology.' in G. Ioup and S. Weinberger (ed) *Interlanguage Phonology*. Cambridge: Newbury House p.165-175.
- Bohn, O.-S. 1995. 'Cross-language speech perception in adults: First language transfer doesn't tell it all.' in W. Strange (ed) *Speech Perception and Linguistic Experience*. Baltimore: York Press p.273-304.
- Bowen, T. and Marks, J. 1992. *The Pronunciation Book: Student centred activities for pronunciation work*. London: Longman
- Brown, A. 1992. *Survey of Attitudes and Practices Related to Pronunciation Teaching*. Perth: AMES
- Burns, A. and Joyce, H. 1997. *Focus on Speaking*. Sydney: NCELTR
- Carey, Michael 1998. 'But is it interactive and does it work? - A review of some CALL English pronunciation CD-ROMs'. Paper presented at AACE ED-MEDIA & ED-TELECOM 98 10th world conference on educational multimedia and hypermedia, Freiburg, Germany; June 20-25, 1998.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. 1997. *Exploring Spoken English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. and Goodwin, J. 1996. *Teaching Pronunciation: A reference for teachers of English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Claire, S. 1993. *Pronunciation in the NSW Adult Migrant English Service: Current Practice, Future Directions*. MA(TESOL), University of Technology, Sydney.

- Claire, S. 1994. 'Computer assisted language learning (CALL) and pronunciation.' *Interchange: Journal of the NSW Adult Migrant Service*. 23.p.35-38.
- Cobb-Clark, D. and Chapman, B. 1999. *The Changing Pattern of Immigrants' Labour Market Experiences (Discussion Paper No. 396)*. Canberra: Centre for Economic Policy Research, Australian National University
- Commonwealth Department of Education. 1978. *Asian Language Notes: Some likely areas of difficulty for Asian learners of English*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia
- Curic, K. 1993/4. 'Structuro-global audio visual (SGAV) methodology in the teaching of pronunciation: An introduction.' in J. Widin (ed) *Approaches to Teaching English Pronunciation*. Sydney: Foundation Studies Training Division, Western Sydney Institute of TAFE p.25-45.
- Fitzpatrick, L., Wignall, L. and McKenna, R. 1999. *The Assessment and Placement Resource for the Literacy and Numeracy Program: Developing pre-training assessments using the National Reporting System*. Melbourne: Communication in Education and Training Pty/Ltd and DETYA
- Forman, R. 1993/4. 'Pronunciation.' in J. Widin (ed) *Approaches to Teaching English Pronunciation*. Sydney: Foundation Studies Training Division, Western Sydney Institute of TAFE p.1-10.
- Fraser, H. 1999. 'ESL pronunciation teaching: Could it be more effective?' *Australian Language Matters*. 7(4) p.7-8.
- Gass, S., Madden, C., Preston, D. and Selinker, L. (ed). 1989. *Variation in Second Language Acquisition: Volume 2, Psycholinguistic Issues*. Clevedon, Phil: Multilingual Matters
- Golding, B. and Volkoff, V. 1999. *Creating Outcomes: Individuals and groups on the VET journey*. Brisbane: Australian National Training Authority
- Golding, B., Volkoff, V. and Ferrier, F. 1997. *Stocktake of Equity Reports and Literature in Vocational Education and Training*. Brisbane: Australian National Training Authority
- Guberina. 1972. *Restricted Bands of Frequencies in Auditory Rehabilitation of the Deaf*. Zagreb: Institute of Phonetics, Faculty of Arts
- Hammond, J. and Derewianka, B. 1999. 'ESL and literacy education: Revisiting the relationship.' *Prospect*. 14(2) p.24-39.
- Hannahs, S. and Young-Scholten, M. (ed). 1997. *Focus on Phonological Acquisition*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins
- Ingram, J. and Park, S. 1997. 'Cross-language vowel perception and production by Japanese and Korean learners of English.' *Journal of Phonetics*. 25 p.343-370.
- James, A. and Leather, J. (ed). 1997. *Second Language Speech: Structure and process*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter
- Kendrick, H. 1997. 'Keep them talking! A project for improving students' L2 pronunciation.' *System*. 25(4) p.545-560.
- Kenworthy, J. 1987. *Teaching English Pronunciation*. London: Longman
- Lau, V. 1999. *Success in Accent Modification: Client satisfaction or perceptual speech change?* BAppSc (Hons) Speech Pathology,
- Lian, A. and Lian, A. 1997. 'The secret of the Shao-Lin monk: Contribution to the intellectual framework for language learning.' *On-CALL*. 11(2) p.2-18.
- Liddicoat, A. and Crozet, C. (ed). 1997. *Teaching Language and Culture*. Canberra: Applied Linguistics Association of Australia
- Lippi-Green, R. 1997. *English with an Accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. London/New York: Routledge

- Macdonald, D., Yule, G. and Powers, M. 1994. 'Attempts to improve English L2 pronunciation: The variable effects of different types of language instruction.' *Language Learning*. 44.1. p.75-100.
- Major, R. 1998. 'Interlanguage phonetics and phonology: An introduction.' *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 20(2) p.131-137.
- McCarthy, M. 1994. 'What should we teach about the spoken language.' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*. 17(2) p.104-120.
- Michel, M. 1999. 'Wither' ESL? Post-literacy prospects for English as a Second Language Programs in Australian schools.' *Prospect*. 14(2) p.4-23.
- Morley, J. (ed). 1994. *Pronunciation Pedagogy and Theory: New views, new directions*. Alexandria, Virginia: TESOL Inc
- Munro, M.J. and Derwing, T.M. 1995. 'Foreign accent, comprehensibility and intelligibility in the speech of second language learners.' *Language Learning*. 45.1. p.75-97.
- Nicholls, R.M. 1985. *Awareness of intonation: A study of metalinguistic knowledge*. UNE thesis.
- Park, S.-G. 1997. *Australian English Pronunciation Acquisition by Korean and Japanese Learners of English*. PhD, University of Queensland.
- Pegolo, C. 1993. 'Fluency and intelligibility in speech production: Making the theories talk.' *Prospect*. 8(3) p.52-62.
- Pennington, M. 1996. *Phonology in English Language Teaching*. Essex: Addison Wesley Longman
- Pittam, J. and Ingram, J. 1990. 'Vietnamese refugees acquiring proficiency with Australian-English vowels: A family case study.' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*. 13 p.25-42.
- Rogerson, P. and Gilbert, J. 1990. *Speaking Clearly: Pronunciation and listening comprehension for learners of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Sainsbury, M. 1994. *Basic Pronunciation Teaching Skills*. Canberra: Canberra Institute of Technology
- Sanguinetti, Jill. 2000. *The Literacy Factor: Adding Value to Training - Investigation of the inclusion of literacy in training packages in the food processing industry*. Victorian Centre of ALNARC. Commonwealth of Australia
- Seidlhofer, B. (ed). 1999. *Pronunciation in Teacher Training: A special issue of 'Speak Out!' (No.24)*. IATEFL, sponsored by CUP
- Strange, W. (ed). 1995. *Speech Perception and Linguistic Experience: Issues in cross-language research*. Baltimore: York Press
- Toda, T. 1994. 'Interlanguage phonology: Acquisition of timing control in Japanese.' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*. 17(2) p.51-76.
- Tsukada, K. 1998. 'Japanese-accented English vowels: A perception study.' *Asia Pacific Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing*. 3 p.43-65.
- VandenHeuvel, A. and Wooden, M. 1999. *New Settlers Have their Say: An analysis of data from the three waves of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia (Dept of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs)
- Volkoff, V. and Golding, B. 1998. *Vocational Education for People from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research
- Volkoff, V., Golding, B. and Jenkin, J. 1999. *The Vocational Essence of ACE*. Adelaide: NCVET/ANTA

- Votano, K. 1993/4. 'Teaching pronunciation.' in J. Widin (ed) *Approaches to Teaching English Pronunciation*. Sydney: Foundation Studies Training Division, Western Sydney Institute of TAFE p.72-89.
- Wajnryb, R., Coan, J. and McCabe, L. 1997. 'What you put into it is what you get out of it: A report on a remedial phonology clinic.' *EA Journal*. 15(2) p.38-51.
- Waller, V. undated (1995?). *Training in English as a second language: Results from the survey of the Special Intervention Program*. Canberra: DEETYA
- Widin, J. (ed). 1993/4. *Approaches to Teaching English Pronunciation*. Sydney: Foundation Studies Training Division, Western Sydney Institute of TAFE
- Willing, K. 1993. *Learning Styles in Adult Migrant Education*. Sydney: NCELTR (first publ 1988)
- Yallop, C. 1995. *English Phonology*. Sydney: NCELTR
- Yavas, M. (ed). 1994. *First and Second Language Phonology*. San Diego: Singular Publishing Group
- Yule, G. and Macdonald, D. 1994. 'The effects of pronunciation teaching.' in J. Morley (ed) *Pronunciation Pedagogy and Theory: New views, new directions*. Alexandria, Virginia: TESOL Inc. p.109-118.
- Zawadzki, H. 1996. *In Tempo*. Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research