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Word Stress and Pronunciation Teaching in English as a Lingua Franca Contexts

Traditionally, pronunciation was taught by reference to native-speaker models. However, as speakers around the world increasingly interact in English as a lingua franca (ELF) contexts, there is less focus on native-speaker targets, and there is wide acceptance that achieving intelligibility is crucial while mimicking native-speaker pronunciation is not important. However, if there is no clear model to refer to, how do we give guidance to students about how to improve their pronunciation, and how do we determine what needs to be fixed in order to enhance intelligibility? This article considers teaching pronunciation in ELF contexts, making reference to a corpus of interactions recorded in Brunei involving 41 speakers from various countries in Southeast Asia, particularly focusing on stress patterns, to see what impact variant stress has on intelligibility. It is found that there is some evidence that word stress may contribute to misunderstandings occurring in ELF interactions.

Traditionally, pronunciation was usually taught by reference to a native-speaker model, generally Received Pronunciation (RP) British English (for example, Roach, 2009) or General American English (for example, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010). While such models of pronunciation continue to work well for people whose language goals include regular interactions with native speakers—especially those who desire to live in places such as Britain or America—they may not be so appropriate for learners of English who primarily want to communicate effectively with other nonnative speakers in an increasingly globalized world. Indeed, as speakers around the world interact more and more in English as a lingua franca (ELF) contexts where most participants are not native speakers, the

overwhelming goal is on achieving a high level of intelligibility, and there is no need for learners of English to closely mimic irrelevant native-speaker styles of speaking (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011), particularly as some features of native-speaker usage, such as omission of the word-final [d] in a phrase such as "dined well" (Cruttenden, 2014, p. 314), do not enhance intelligibility (Deterding, 2010).

However, this raises important issues about how English pronunciation should be taught in ELF contexts. If there is no clear model to refer to, it is unclear how teachers can determine which phonological features their students should acquire in order to enhance their intelligibility and which features are less important. Furthermore, it is uncertain how students and teachers who have studied in native-speaker contexts should adapt when returning to their home countries or when interacting in international situations. Even though aiming for native-speaker competence is often no longer a goal for many learners of English, the fact remains that the overwhelming majority of misunderstandings in international contexts arise because of pronunciation, so good pronunciation is essential (Deterding, 2013), but we need to consider what we mean by good pronunciation.

This article explores issues concerned with teaching pronunciation and speaking in ELF contexts, making reference to two corpora of interactions between nonnative speakers from various countries and focusing particularly on the role of word stress for maintaining intelligibility.

Speaking Versus Listening

Before we consider which features of pronunciation are important for the intelligibility of English, we should emphasize the fundamental distinction between speaking English and listening to English (productive vs. receptive skills). While it is essential for all learners of English to develop the ability to understand spoken English produced by a wide range of people, including native speakers, it may not always be helpful to imitate the speech of native speakers too closely. For example, Gardiner and Deterding (in press) have shown that use of idiomatic phrases such as *for good*, *funny enough,* and *acquired taste* can give rise to misunderstandings in ELF contexts. So, while it is of course essential for learners of English to become familiar with phrases such as these as part of their passive vocabulary, they should be wary about using them when communicating in international settings.

The distinction between receptive and productive skills is true not just for vocabulary but even more for pronunciation. While all listeners need to develop the ability to understand native-speaker patterns of pronunciation, including the widespread use of simplification

processes such as assimilation, reduction, and deletion, replicating these patterns in ELF interactions can lead to misunderstandings. Cruttenden (2014) presents a detailed account of the pronunciation of RP British English, but at the same time he stresses, "Foreign learners need not attempt to reproduce in their speech all the special context forms of words mentioned in the foregoing sections" (p. 321). Shockey (2003) has described in some detail the patterns of simplification and elision often shown by native speakers of English, including an American pronouncing *particularly* as [pʰtɪkəli] (p. 26) and a British speaker saying *doesn't want* as [ˈdʌzə̃ʔˈwɐ̃ʔ] (p. 37). However, while it is valuable for learners of English to be able to decode such pronunciation when they hear it, communicating with these forms can be less beneficial.

Pronunciation classes often include exercises such as mirroring and echoing in which the goal is to have students carefully imitate native speakers. Chung (2017) suggests that learners of English can find valuable material on native-speaker pronunciation by listening carefully and repeatedly to TV series such as *Gilmore Girls, Seinfeld,* and *Grey's Anatomy*; furthermore, she offers some excellent practical advice for those who want to copy the pronunciation found in these TV series, including activities that involve silent imitation and mastery of the phonetic patterns before the learner attempts to articulate the sounds. However, while such TV series certainly provide quality material for developing advanced listening skills, when applied in an ELF setting, some of the learned pronunciation features can actually hinder communication. Hence, teachers in ELF contexts should evaluate their rationale for using such activities. If used for listening purposes, a variety of resources with speakers from an array of nationalities should be presented in addition to those produced by native speakers. Even Chung (2017) acknowledges that development of listening skills should not focus on just a single accent, and learners of English must be exposed to a wide range of listening materials to enable them to function effectively in the modern world.

Even though mimicking native-speaker pronunciation is often no longer the goal in ELF settings, Deterding (2013) has shown that pronunciation remains crucial in maintaining intelligibility in international interactions. In 183 tokens of misunderstanding that he collated from ELF conversations, pronunciation was implicated as one factor giving rise to a misunderstanding in more than 86% of the tokens. Clearly good pronunciation is vitally important in enhancing intelligibility and avoiding breakdowns in communication. However, if speakers in ELF contexts do not need to closely imitate the patterns of British or American speech, only comprehend them, they need spe-

cific guidance about which aspects of pronunciation should be prioritized. And instead of prescribing norms based on native speech, more interactions between nonnative speakers must be investigated to determine which pronunciation features cause misunderstandings.

Features of Pronunciation for ELF Communication

Different scholars have made varying proposals about which sounds to teach for learners of English who want to speak well. Cruttenden (2014) suggests that a number of allophonic features regularly found in RP British English are not necessary for highly intelligible International English, including glottal reinforcement before final /p, t, k/ in words such as *reap*, *beat,* and *beak* (so the final consonant is often preceded by a glottal stop), use of a syllabic lateral or nasal at the end of words such as *bottle* or *lesson* (rather than the [əl] and [ən] that may be found with many ELF speakers), and devoicing of final voiced fricatives in pre-pausal position (so *please* is often pronounced by native speakers with [s] rather than /z/ at the end). Furthermore, he notes that there is little need to distinguish between /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, as these two consonants have a low functional load (the frequency in which English words are differentiated by means of these two consonants), and consequently there is little chance of *usually* or *leisure* being misunderstood if they are pronounced with [ʃ] instead of /ʒ/; he additionally suggests that [t] and [d] may be acceptable in place of /θ/ and /ð/ (Cruttenden, 2014, p. 336). We might note that the Civil Aviation Authority mandates that *three* be pronounced as [triː] and *thousand* as [taʊsænd] (Civil Aviation Authority, 2013), so apparently it believes that use of [t] at the start of both these words actually enhances intelligibility in the critical domain of air traffic control.

Jenkins (2000) has made some even more radical proposals, suggesting a Lingua Franca Core (LFC) of those core features of pronunciation that she claims are necessary for intelligibility in international communication, while non-core features do not need to be taught. For example, she suggests that not only is there is no need for users of English in ELF contexts to produce the dental fricatives /θ, ð/, but in addition, vowel reduction, stress-timed rhythm, and the intonational tunes typically found in native-speaker pronunciation are also not necessary for achieving international intelligibility. Furthermore, the status of word stress is uncertain in the LFC. Crucially, while Cruttenden (2014) insists that standard patterns of word stress (which he terms "word accent patterns," p. 340) are essential, Jenkins (2000) suggests that they may not be important for maintaining a high level of intelligibility in international contexts. Indeed, Cruttenden (2014)

notes that a crucial difference between his approach and that of Jenkins (2000) is that she treats "word stress (= word accent) among the less important 'non-core'" (p. 352).

While many would probably agree that there is no need for learners to master all the fine details of allophonic variation listed by Cruttenden, such as glottal reinforcement, syllabic /l/ and /n/, and prepausal devoicing of fricatives, the LFC proposals of Jenkins (2000) are rather more controversial. In particular, many teachers and researchers alike are taken aback at the suggestion that word stress may not be important. In fact, the findings of Jenkins (2000) were based on just 40 tokens of misunderstanding by speakers from two different countries, Switzerland and Japan, so the claims need to be checked by investigating corpora of interactions by speakers from a wider range of backgrounds. This article will explore interactions between nonnative speakers from a variety of different countries, and it will focus specifically on word stress.

Word Stress

Definition of Word Stress

Before considering whether word stress is important for intelligibility in ELF contexts, we need to consider what we mean by stress. Fundamentally, the perception of stress is dependent on four features: pitch prominence, loudness, duration, and vowel quality, so stressed syllables generally have more pitch movement than unstressed ones, tend to be louder and longer, and usually contain a full vowel (Roach, 2009). Consequently, an unstressed syllable will be less prominent and consist of a softer, quicker, centralized vowel that has very little pitch movement. In unstressed syllables, the vowel is often reduced to the schwa /ə/, and /ɪ, ʊ/ may also function as reduced vowels. The alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables in English creates a rhythm that is not found in some other languages. In languages such as English that are described as stress-timed, there is roughly an even duration between successive stressed syllables, while languages in which each syllable is pronounced with approximately the same length of time are classified as having a syllable-timed rhythm (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Though each of the above components contributes to the perception of a stressed syllable, each feature is not necessarily perceived equally in importance; consequently, what may sound like a stressed syllable in one dialect may not sound stressed in another (Tan, 2005), and this difference raises questions about misunderstandings when word stress is perceived to be produced on an unexpected syllable. In fact, we should note that many new varieties of English around

the world have fewer reduced vowels than British or American English, and they are often claimed to have syllable-timed rhythm (Fuchs, 2016). In varieties of English such as this, word stress may not be as salient as in native-speaker varieties that can be described as having a more stress-timed rhythm and typically have frequent use of reduced vowels.

Cutler (2015) notes that although stress is an essential part of English words, when identifying words native speakers depend much more on the quality of the vowels than the other attributes that make up stress, and Richards (2016) similarly notes that, in English, the "full versus reduced vowel quality opposition is so marked that L1 English users learn to treat the suprasegmental cues as redundant" (p. 2). Moreover, Cutler (2015) observes that in English there are actually few words that are distinguished purely by means of stress, such as *INsight* versus *inCITE* and also the noun *IMport* versus the verb *imPORT*. In fact, although there are at least 150 words for which the noun and verb have different stress patterns (Aitchison, 1991), most of them, including *convert*, *conduct, subject, object, project, record,* and *rebel*, are distinguished by vowel quality as well as stress, as the nouns for these words all have a full vowel in the first syllable, while the verbs all have a reduced vowel (either /ə/ or /ɪ/) in the first syllable.

Field (2005) has shown that shifts in stress can have a substantial impact on correct word perception both for native-speaker and nonnative-speaker listeners, especially when the shift is rightward in words such as *husBAND* and *coffEE*, while a leftward shift from the second to the first syllable of words such as *ENjoy* and *FORget* has less effect. However, Field's study was based on the acoustic manipulation of words in laboratory experiments and not in conversational settings. The studies that follow will explore the findings of two recent corpora on misunderstandings in ELF interactions, specifically investigating the intelligibility of nonstandard word stress.

Word Stress in Misunderstandings

Deterding (2013) collected a corpus of misunderstandings from conversations between speakers from various countries including Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Taiwan. Of the 183 tokens of misunderstanding that were found, unexpected stress placement was a major factor contributing to the problem in the four tokens shown in Table 1. (In the "Heard as" column, "??" indicates that during subsequent feedback, the listener was unable to make a guess about the word; in the "Context" column, the misunderstood words are bold, stress is shown in upper case, and "(.)" indicates a short pause.)

Table 1
Misunderstandings Involving Shifts in Word Stress

No.	*Speaker*	*Listener*	*Word(s)*	*Heard as*	*Context*
1	MHk	FTw	over	all full	the past it's **oVER** you know
2	MIn	FMa	academic	i got ??	meaning **aCADemic** or (.) go
3	MIn	FTw	pre-islamic	??	the: **PRE-islamic** architecture
4	MIn	FTw	return	leave	if i re- i **REturn** to Jakarta

In Token 1, stress occurred on the second syllable of *oVER* spoken by a male from Hong Kong, and a listener from Taiwan heard *all full* instead. Tokens 2, 3, and 4 are all by a male speaker from Indonesia. In Token 2 the second syllable of *aCADemic* was stressed, in Token 3 the first syllable of *PRE-islamic* was stressed, and in Token 4 the first syllable of *REturn* was stressed. Though other factors may also have played a role, such as the medial consonant in *over* being pronounced as [f] in Token 1, and little aspiration on the first /k/ in *academic* in Token 2 with the result that it was heard as [g], unexpected stress placement seems to have been a major factor causing the misunderstanding in all four of these tokens.

We should note in this respect that the speaker from Indonesia who was involved in Tokens 2 to 4 exhibited unexpected stress in many words, including initial stress in *PREfer*, *PERspective*, *SYMbolic, COMmittee,* and *POLluted*, medial stress in *inNOcent*, *kinderGARten*, and *diffiCULties,* and final stress in *arCHIVE*, *thereFORE*, *stereoTYPE,* and *emPIRE*; however, these words were understood, and only those listed in Table 1 were misunderstood. The extract shown in (5) is relevant in this respect. (In this extract, "<1> </1>" shows the start and end of overlapping speech, and "@" indicates laughter.)

(5) FTw: and the other place i like is erm lombok
MIn: wow yeah lombok right <1> yes </1>
FTw: <1> it's a kind </1> of poor (.) poor cousin of bali
MIn: correct yeah
FTw: @
MIn: and especially still **virgin** in the sense then (.) not mu- pol- not much (.) POLluted by the tourists

In this extract, the listener from Taiwan failed to understand *virgin* (which was pronounced as [ˈvɪədʒɪn]) due to the quality of the vowel in the first syllable but she had no problem with *POLluted*, even with its unexpected stress pattern.

In addition to the tokens listed in Table 1, there were two tokens, shown in Table 2, in which there seems to be no clearly stressed syllable in the misunderstood word, so we can surmise that the absence of clear stress placement may have been an issue in these two tokens. Alternatively, the lack of vowel reduction in the first syllable of *attend* and *agenda* might be seen as the problem. From these tokens, we see that it is often hard to separate the effects of stress and vowel reduction, as, in the absence of vowel reduction, it can be hard to determine which syllable is stressed.

Table 2
Misunderstandings Involving Absence of Clear Stress

No.	*Speaker*	*Listener*	*Word(s)*	*Heard as*	*Context*
6	MNg	FBr	you attend a	??	**you attend** a (.) brunei school
7	FMa	FTw	agenda	agent now	the main **agenda** would be to

We can conclude, therefore, that unexpected or unclear stress placement can sometimes cause problems for intelligibility in ELF contexts. However, in this corpus it was implicated in only six out of 183 tokens, and there were other features of pronunciation that had a greater impact on intelligibility—particularly loss of the second consonant in initial clusters such as /kl/ and /pr/ and confusion between /r/, /l/, and /w/ (Deterding, 2013).

We will now consider another corpus that is designed specifically to investigate the impact of word stress on intelligibility in ELF interactions.

Further Data on Word Stress in ELF Interactions

A new corpus of data is now being collated in Brunei Darussalam from recordings based on two find-the-difference tasks involving pictures. In all cases, each participant was paired with someone from another country and they orally compared their pictures without seeing their partner's. The pictures included a large number of objects that could be described with polysyllabic words, such as *balloon*, *guitar, mirror*, *giraffe*, *computer*, *umbrella*, *calendar*, *photographer*, *orchestra*,

racket, *fourteen,* and *forty* (Lewis, 2017). Forty-one participants from nine countries in Southeast Asia were recorded while engaged in the tasks. While the results are preliminary, there are some instances in which unexpected stress appears to cause a problem, such as in (8), where a male participant from Vietnam produced *BALloon* with initial stress including a full vowel in the first syllable and a female participant from Indonesia failed to understand him and had to ask for clarification. (In this extract, '?' shows rising intonation.)

(8) MVn: how about the **BALloon**?
FIn1: <1> the? </1>
MVn: <1> that </1> i have the (.) er two BALloon (.) s (1.2) two BALloons
FIn1: balLOONS? <2> no </2>
MVn: <2> yeah </2> (.) you don't have it?
FIn1: no

In this case, the Vietnamese speaker said the word three times before the Indonesian understood it. We might note that, in example (8), the Vietnamese speaker managed to correct his grammar by adding an *-s* on the end of *balloon*, but he was unable to fix his pronunciation of the word.

Another clear instance of misunderstanding involving word stress is shown in example (9). This instance occurred while a Malaysian female and a Cambodian male were discussing the times on the clock in their pictures. Even though the clocks in the pictures they were describing actually showed different times, as one showed 7:14 while the other had 7:40, they agreed that the times on their clocks were the same.

(9) FMa: and uh my time here written seven fourteen A.M.
MCb1: hm-mm
FMa: do you have the time there? (1)
MCb1: seven FOR- **forTY**?
FMa: yeah seven **fourTEEN**
MCb1: it the same? yeah?
FMa: <1> oh just the same </1>
MCb1: <1> it but uh the </1> time? is on the table?

In the female speaker's initial statement about the time in her picture, the word *fourteen* did not have a clear stress placement as she emphasized *a.m.* instead. In his response, the male participant started off with a strong initial *for*, but when he repeated himself, adding the *-ty*,

the first syllable *for-* was no longer stressed and thus the second syllable of *forTY* ended up being more prominent. As a result, the female participant heard his time as being the same as hers. Even though the Malaysian speaker placed standard stress on her final instance of *four-TEEN*, it was not clear enough for the Cambodian speaker to notice that she was saying *fourteen* rather than *forty*.

Table 3 demonstrates a few other instances in which word stress was involved in misunderstandings.

Table 3
Additional Misunderstandings Involving Shifts in Word Stress

No.	*Speaker*	*Listener*	*Word(s)*	*Heard as*	*Context*
10	MCb1	FIn2	circled	called	number thirteen (.) is **cirCLED**
11	FTh	MCb2	obstacle	??	use the fruit cart as the uh **obSTAcle**
12	FCb	MLa	umbrella	??	there is an **umbreLLA**
13	MCb3	FLa1	orchestra	a pesto	taking some photos (.) on a **orCHEstra**
14	MCb3	FLa2	racket	a lot kit	there is a **raCKET**

Each of these tokens lacked other phonological problems that could have caused the misunderstanding, as speakers produced their consonants fairly well, including clusters, and they differentiated between /l/ and /r/. However, because of the variable stress placement, speakers produced full vowels in unexpectedly prominent locations rather than the reduced vowel that would traditionally occur.

In Token 10, a Cambodian male was explaining that the date July 13 was circled on the calendar in his picture. However, since he placed stress on the second syllable of the word *cirCLED*, the female Indonesian listener heard *called* instead. In instances 11 and 12, a Cambodian and a Laotian listener were uncertain about what their respective partners were saying. A Cambodian speaker in Tokens 13 and 14 was misunderstood by two different Laotian participants after using nonstandard stress and producing full vowels where reduced ones might be expected. However, we should also note that, in Token 13, grammar might have been an additional factor, as the speaker said a man was *taking some photos* (.) *on* something instead of *of* something as well as using the article *a* instead of *an* before *orchestra*.

In all these examples from this new corpus, except for example

(8) involving *balloon*, the stress was shifted rightward, and this is consistent with the previously noted finding of Field (2005) that a rightward shift of stress has a larger impact on intelligibility than a leftward shift. Further investigation is needed to see if this pattern is consistent throughout the corpus. If it is, this could provide important guidance for teachers: They should pay careful attention to avoiding rightward stress shift, but they might not need to be so concerned about stress being placed earlier in a word.

As with the corpus from Deterding (2013), interactions also included instances in which nonstandard word stress placement occurred but did not cause misunderstanding. As Table 4 illustrates, a variety of speakers used word stress in nontraditional patterns, yet they were still understood by their listeners.

Table 4
Instances of Understood Nonstandard Stress

No.	*Speaker*	*Listener*	*Said as*	*Context*
15	FTh1	FIn2	calenDAR	on the calenDAR
16	FMm	MLa	GUItar	a GUItar (.) a GUItar
17	FMm	MCb2	photoGRApher	one man is photoGRApher
18	FIn3	MTh1	PHOtographer	there is a PHOtographer
19	MVn	FPh	inJURED	people (.) was inJURED
20	FTh2	MCb3	MEchanic	he looks like uh (.) maybe the MEchanic

In the examples in Table 4, speakers from Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Vietnam were able to communicate with their listeners from Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines despite using variable word stress.

Other misunderstandings not related to stress occurred in this corpus, especially the omission of some consonants in clusters, and unclear /r/ or /l/ sounds as seen in the first example in Table 5. In Token 21, an Indonesian listener heard *cow* when her Thai partner was trying to say *clouds*. In Token 22, a female listener from Myanmar was not able to understand the word *device* as her Cambodian partner did not produce a clear final [s]. In Token 23, a different Cambodian participant had difficulty comprehending his Vietnamese partner's sentence, as she omitted the /b/ from *broken*. In Token 24, a Vietnamese speaker attempted to use the American flap for his /t/ in *bottle* and then struggled with the final /l/, and his partner from the Philippines was unsure what he was saying.

Table 5
Samples of Misunderstandings Not Related to Stress

No.	*Speaker*	*Listener*	*Word(s)*	*Heard as*	*Context*
21	MTh2	FInF2	cloud	cow	there are some **cloud**
22	MCb4	FMm1	device	??	shop that sells electronic **device**
23	FVn4	MCb1	broken	??	because they are **broken**
24	MVn1	FPh1	bottle	??	he hold the **bottle**
25	MCb3	FLa2	some wine	someone	a man (.) ha. is drinking. maybe (.) maybe **some wine**

Token 25 is unique in that it was probably a mixture of vowel production and sentence stress that created the confusion. A Cambodian male was attempting to state that the man in the picture might have been drinking some wine. However, *wine* was not very prominent, so his /aɪ/ was not clearly heard, and his female Laotian partner heard *someone* instead, apparently believing the Cambodian was starting a new sentence.

In sum, this corpus includes some pronunciation misunderstandings that are consistent with the claims of Jenkins (2000) about the Lingua Franca Core, and also some that may challenge it. The instances documented clearly indicate that although it is possible for unexpected word stress to occur and still be intelligible, there are also instances in which it hinders intelligibility, and these new tokens of word stress misunderstandings, in which speakers all used a full vowel rather than the reduced vowel that might be expected in native-speaker pronunciation, are consistent with the claim by Cutler (2015) that word stress misunderstandings may mostly be related to vowel quality.

Word Stress Discussion

The examples discussed in this article confirm that misunderstandings can occur because of unexpected word stress placement, and consequently it is premature to exclude it from English teaching in EFL settings. Further research, however, is needed to determine how frequent such problems are and under what contexts they occur, as there are also numerous examples of unexpected stress being understood. For example, if the claims of Field (2005) about rightward shift in stress having a greater impact than leftward shift are confirmed in a more extensive analysis, this can provide valuable guidance to

teachers about which features of pronunciation they should focus on. Evaluating the role of reduced versus full vowels might also contribute to a better understanding about when misunderstandings occur with nonstandard word stress.

Even assuming that stress placement is a significant factor in causing misunderstandings in ELF contexts, it is likely to be more important in native-speaker contexts. So while the lack of vowel reduction and use of more syllable-timed rhythm in the pronunciation of many speakers of English varieties may reduce the salience of stress, making it less important for maintaining intelligibility in ELF contexts, learners of English who plan to interact with native speakers should pay careful attention to word stress, as unpredictable stress placement is likely to cause a breakdown in communication. Those who will predominantly communicate with other second-language users of English, on the other hand, may decide that word stress is not a key priority, and they might decide to focus on other features of English pronunciation.

At the same time, advanced English speakers should learn to be more tolerant about variable word stress when interacting with speakers around the world. For example, there is an MRT (subway) station in Singapore called *LaVENder*, and it is typically pronounced with stress on the second syllable (presumably by analogy with words such as *NoVEMber*, *DeCEMber*, *reMEMber*, *imPOSter*, *seMESter*, *surRENder,* and *preTENder*). Visitors to the country should become accustomed to this pronunciation of *Lavender* if they want to travel around easily, as it seems unfortunate to insist on stress on the first syllable just because that is how the word is said elsewhere.

The ELF Classroom

In preparing students and future teachers for ELF contexts, there are a number of strategies that can be used in the classroom. Our first suggestion is that learners of English should be presented with a wide range of material spoken by people from an array of different backgrounds, so they become accustomed to listening to different accents. This will enable them to function successfully in ELF contexts. Even if students themselves decide they want to try to adhere closely to native-speaker norms in their own pronunciation, they will have to interact with other speakers who deviate from such norms, and it is essential that they be able to understand each other.

Second, even if teachers decide to base their pronunciation teaching on a fixed reference model, maybe one derived from native speakers in Britain or America, they might want to consider being less stringent on correcting every feature of pronunciation by their stu-

dents that deviates from this model. Some aspects are more important than others, and it should not be necessary for learners of English to mimic every element of pronunciation exhibited by native speakers, such as use of syllabic /l/ and /n/ and word-final fricative devoicing. Instead, focusing on some of the features that cause the majority of misunderstandings in ELF settings might be a more productive use of classroom time. Most consonants other than /θ/ and /ð/, especially /l/ and /r/ as well as consonant clusters, contribute to a majority of misunderstandings.

Third, acquiring accommodation skills may be more important than teaching students to adhere to some native-speaker norms that could even lead to misunderstandings. Accommodating one's language to the needs of one's listeners and adapting one's speech accordingly is an essential skill that all speakers of English should acquire. Upon observing and describing successful ELF communication, both in business and academic settings, strategic intercultural communication skills have frequently been evident (Seidlhofer, 2011). Thus, learners of English should be encouraged to develop strategies for making themselves understood, by speaking more slowly, by enunciating clearly when they find they are not understood, and by paraphrasing their speech to use more easily understood words. Teachers should try to equip their students with these communicative skills. Walker (2010) proposes that accommodation is something that should be promoted and developed in the English language-teaching curriculum.

For example, in example (9), the distinction between *fourteen* and *forty* is actually not very salient even in native-speaker pronunciation, especially as *fourteen* can undergo stress shift if the following noun has initial stress (e.g., "FOURteen PEOple"). It would be valuable for learners of English to be aware of this and to develop strategies for dealing with it, possibly by adding *one four* or *four zero* to clarify the intended number. Similar forms of accommodation could enhance the success of their communication in English.

Finally, we suggest that word stress continue to be taught in the ELF classroom until further research can firmly determine its importance. Unlike simplification patterns that sometimes make speech more difficult for the foreign listener, word stress does not appear to cause any kind of impediment when used correctly, and it assists some listeners. There is no benefit in removing word stress from the classroom. Introducing the stress pattern into initial vocabulary learning or marking students' readings where there is an unusual or moving stress pattern can only assist students. In contrast, in ELF settings

where reduced vowels are not common, perhaps it might be unnecessary to insist on reduced vowels as long as prominence is shown in some other way.

In conclusion, closely mimicking native-speaker styles of pronunciation is not important for many learners of English who want mainly to interact in ELF contexts, and there are better ways of using classroom time. At the same time, however, good pronunciation is important, though it remains uncertain which features of pronunciation teachers should focus on. There is some evidence that shifted word stress may cause problems for intelligibility in some situations, but further research is needed to establish how important this feature of pronunciation is for listeners from a wide range of different backgrounds.

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