TESOL 2016　　　*Reflecting Forward*　　　**Baltimore, Maryland**

Pronunciation Hot Topics: A Global Perspective
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Summary of the study

- Follow-up to 2014 PSLLT summary of "hot topics" on an invitational e-list for international pronunciation specialists (Brinton & Chan, 2015)
- Time frame: August 2014 - August 2015
- Selection criteria
  - Number of words
  - Number of exchanges
  - Number of discussants
  - Global interest [new]
  - Depth of discussion [new]

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A sampling of e-list topics, 2015

- When learning an L2 with audio input, is written text a help or a hindrance?
- To what extent does pronunciation correlate with overall language proficiency?
- Of what importance are vowel length distinctions in teaching English vowels?
- Is it possible for a teacher to teach a better pronunciation than his or her own?
- Can a particular music genre help pronunciation learning?

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Vietnamese speakers	Stress shifts in BrE & AmE
2015 HOT TOPICS	
Vowel charts	Contrastive analysis

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Vietnamese speakers	• 5042 words • 13 discussants • 23 exchanges
Stress shifting in BrE & AmE	• 2245 words • 12 discussants • 25 exchanges
Vowel charts	• 3401 words • 13 discussants • 29 exchanges
Contrastive analysis	• 1007 words • 8 discussants • 9 exchanges

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Topic 1: Vietnamese speakers
người Việt học tiếng Anh

Initial query: How can we help Vietnamese speakers acquire a "listener friendly" pronunciation?

Perceptual elements

Productive elements

Preparatory elements

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To help **Vietnamese** speakers learn English pronunciation Giúp người nói tiếng Việt phát âm tiếng Anh

1. Focus on breathing, breath control, airstream mechanism; explosion vs. implosion.
2. Gain awareness and control/prevention of glottal stop.
3. Focus on auditory perception independent of written text.
   a. Tell learners what to listen for.
   b. Model the missing/incorrect pronunciation.
   c. Get learners' own speaking output to converge on the target pronunciation, forming a closed-circuit auditory feedback loop.
4. Sing English songs to gain a feel of English, to create a motor memory, enhance prosodic elements of spoken language.

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To help **Vietnamese** speakers learn English pronunciation Giúp người nói tiếng Việt phát âm tiếng Anh

5. Focus on segmentals, esp. final consonants, e.g., /l/-/w/, /l/-/n/, /t/-/s/, deletion, /ʔ/, clusters
6. Focus on word stress: `VIS-it vs. vi`SIT
7. Focus on pitch patterns. Retrain the way the brain processes pitch.
8. Techniques that may backfire:
   - *Say it this way.*
   - *Don't say it that way.*
   - Relying written text: orthography can confuse.

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Topic 2: Stress shifts in BrE & AmE

Initial query: Do speakers of British English and American English shift stress differently?

| Priestess–Princess |
| French-English influences |
| Noun/Verb distinctions |

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Priestess–Princess

1. A British narrator stresses pries`**TESS** and on **ESS** of some but not all other words with suffix "-ess". Why?
2. LPD gives stress on syllable 2 of pries`**TESS** as the preferred pronunciation for British English with a chart and notes:
   a. Younger people have a greater tendency than older people to stress the first syllable, suggesting that this is an on-going sound change.
   b. Still, 60% in 1998 poll preferred **prin`CESS** over **`PRIN-cess**
3. Prediction: If the trends of princess and priestess are similar, the first syllable of both will eventually predominate in Britain.
4. Stress shifting dependent on context:
   - She's a prin`CESS. `PRIN-cess Di-AN-a. (BrE)

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French↔English influences?

1. BrE may tend to stress words that look French on the last syllable while AmE tends to shift the stress forward.
   - emplo`YEE/em`PLOY-ee, lemon`ADE/`LEMonade, prin`CESS/PRIN-cess
2. BrE may tend to change more French words to conform to English stress than AmE.
   - `GARage/ga`RAGE, `MASsage/mas`SAGE
3. Vocab borrowed from French are given different stress patterns in BrE an AmE; this tells more about BrE & AmE than about Fr.
4. As French words become Anglicized, the stress moves to the first syllable.
   - `VILLage, `MARriage, `CARriage, `VOYage all now have initial stress (except Bon voyage)
   - col`LAGE, mas`SAGE still have final stress
   - gar`AGE/`GARage–variable
   - Prediction: all these nouns will have initial stress.
5. A long vowel or otherwise "heavy" syllable may prevail: The final syllable may remain stressed on these word types:
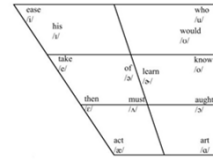   - mas`SAGE, u`NIQUE, pictur`ESQUE

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Noun/verb stress distinction

1. **Permit**: LPD shows BrE `PERmit (n) vs. per`MIT (v); same for AmE but 2nd pron for noun is perMIT.
2. Language change: 1570 dictionary listed 3 such words: `REB-el/re`BEL, `REC-ord/re`CORD, `OUT-law/out`LAW. By 1932,150 such word distinctions existed.
3. **Address**: BrE does not generally have a noun/verb distinction: ad`DRESS on both. AmE prefers `AD-dress (n), ad`DRESS (v). Same with recess, with AmE leading the change.
4. **Research**: AmE and Estuary English tend to follow this distinction `RE-search/re`SEARCH ; other varieties may follow the trend towards American noun/verb distinction.

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Topic 3: Vowel charts

Initial query: What is your reaction to this new pedagogical vowel chart of English which represents vowel length in concentric rings and vowel quality in radiating spokes?
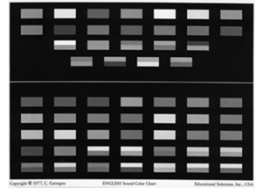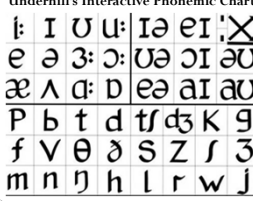

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Reactions and suggestions
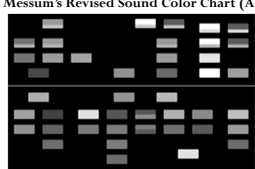
- "My intro linguistics students would have found it wildly confusing."
- Revise in accordance with the 8th edition of *Gimson's Pronunciation of English* to eliminate vowels (e.g., /æ/) which are disappearing from General British. Also, would need to be radically revised for American English.
- What is gained by moving away from the conventional mouth formation related (MFR) chart, which signals the general locations in the mouth where sound formation begins?
- The assignment of color in the chart appears random. Why use color? It is not useful for those who are color blind and potentially confusing for those who have synesthesia.
- Why is /ɛ/ not used to represent the vowel in *leg*? The vowel at 8 o'clock should read *eye*, not *ye*. The diphthong in *tourist* is missing. Also absent from the chart is the movement associated with diphthongs.
- Confusing to have so many vowels represented with /r/. Why not use postvocalic /n/ or some other coda?

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In defense of the proposed chart

- To avoid confusion, students could be introduced to the chart on a need-to-know basis.
- The chart is meant to be compatible with British learner dictionaries; hence /æ/ is retained and /e/ is used in place of /ɛ/ and. Admittedly, it would require substantial revision to represent American English.
- The MFR chart does *not* capture the 6 long/short vowel pairs. The proposed chart *does*; in addition to vowel length, it captures the idea of vowel quality.
- Currently just "experimenting" with the color aspects of the chart. It could potentially be used to reinforce the patterning of the chart.
- /r/ is crucial in BE long vowels such as *shirt* and *hair*; other codas not possible.
- Diphthong in *tourist* was intentionally omitted as it has coalesced in GB with the vowel in *fork*.
- The chart allows for regional variability, since it does not (like the MFR chart) situate the vowel in a fixed location and imply precision of articulation.

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Topic 4: Contrastive analysis

Initial query: Of what value is the contrastive analysis hypothesis to pronunciation research and/or teaching today?

Contrastive analysis hypothesis: the claim that the principal barrier to SLA is *interference* of the L1 system with the L2 system (Lado, 1957)

"Strong" version of CAH: the application of CA to *predict* areas of learner difficulty in the L2 (Wardaugh, 1970)

"Weak" version of CAH: the recognition that CA has *explanatory power* (i.e., it can be applied after the fact to help explain learner difficulties) but lacks *predictive power* (Wardaugh, 1970)

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General comments

- Important to keep in mind the distinction between the "weak" and "strong versions of CAH and whether the model is being applied to production or perception (the original model was intended to describe perceptual processes)
- Alternate hypotheses:

Eckman's (1977) Markedness Differential Hypothesis
Best's (1994) Perceptual Assimilation Model
Flege's (1995) Speech Learning Model
Kuhl & Iverson's (1995) Perceptual Magnet Effect
MacWhinney's (2008) Unified Model

- Flege's SLM is more credible than the CAH because it adds a third (i.e., "similar") category to the binary "same" vs. "different" categories of the CAH
- All of the above models require a satisfactory operationalization of what it means for sounds in two languages to be the same, similar, or different

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In defense of Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis is needed and valuable, if underestimated.

It may not explain all errors (e.g., those due to the developmental processes of interlanguage) but to a large extent it reliably predicts features of a foreign accent.

Flege's SLM is obviously superior to CA; however, it relies on experimental verification of the same/similar/different categories and is therefore more demanding than CA

CA is a useful way of looking at the issue of transfer. There are many useful works written that apply CA cross linguistically, including work on prosody (e.g., Hirst & Di Cristo, 1998).

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There was a time when CAH was considered "politically incorrect," but a contrastive study of the phonologies of different languages yields very valuable information for the linguist and the teacher. I was not particularly interested in absolute accuracy of FL pronunciation, but in intelligibility, and what interferes with intelligible pronunciation/perception. CA (if not CAH) provides invaluable information.

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Conclusions

- The value of these e-list discussions is significant.
- It allows practitioners to post queries and receive feedback from a worldwide network of members with a variety of teaching environments and experience researching different aspects of pronunciation.
- As a forum for open discussion among professionals, it is a safe place to propose a new or different concept or interpretation and critique each other's ideas.
- It brings here-to-fore unheard of ideas to some, while confirming and reassuring familiar ideas to others.
- The **hot topics** we shared today constitute just a small selection of topics that generated meaningful discussion about pronunciation teaching and learning.

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