The Conditional Relevance of Native Speaker Pronunciation in ELF Situations

George O'Neal
Niigata University

Reference Data:
O'Neal, G. (2015). The conditional relevance of native speaker pronunciation in ELF situations. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *JALT2014 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

In this study, I investigated the relevance of native speaker (NS) pronunciation for speakers of English as a lingua franca (ELF). ELF has been defined as any usage of English among speakers of different first language backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2011). Research indicates that ELF is the most common usage of English in the world, and that it exceeds English usage among NSs (Ostler, 2010). This finding warrants the following question: If most people who use English are not NSs of English, and if most of its speakers use English with other people for whom it is not a first language, then how relevant are NS pronunciation standards for ELF speakers? Using conversation analysis (CA) to examine repair sequences in ELF interactions in which pronunciation is oriented to as a trouble source, this study found that NS pronunciation standards can become conditionally relevant during repair sequences in which the restoration of intelligibility is the goal.

本研究は、国際通用語としての英語の英語話者にとって、英語のネイティブスピーカーの発音はどれほど適切かを検討する。国際通用語としての英語は、第一言語が異なる英語話者の間の英語使用として定義される（Seidlhofer, 2011）。様々な研究が国際通用語としての英語はこの世界で最も頻繁に使われる英語になっていることを明らかにしている（Ostler, 2010）。この事実が次の質問を正当化している。もし英語を使うほとんどの人はノンネイティブスピーカーとしたら、またノンネイティブスピーカーは他のノンネイティブスピーカーと話すのに英語を使うとすると、ネイティブスピーカーの標準的な発音はどれほど適切だろうか。会話分析の方法論によって行われた本研究は、発音が問題の原因になっている場合、修復連鎖（repair sequences）において、ネイティブスピーカーの標準的な発音が、条件付きではあるが適切になると主張する。

ALTHOUGH NOBODY denies that English has become the lingua franca of the world, few scholars, and even fewer English teachers in Japan, seriously contend with the significance and pedagogical implications of this. The fact is that most of the world uses English in some capacity and that Japanese students will most likely use English with other nonnative speakers. This has direct implications for the pedagogy of English (Canagarajah, 2013; Deterding, 2013; Jenkins, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2014; Suenobu, 2010). Although the diffusion of English has affected all aspects of English, in this paper I focus solely on the relationship between English as a lingua franca (ELF) usage and pronunciation intelligibility.

More specifically, I seek to answer the following question: If most people who use English are not native speakers (NSs) of English, and if most of the speakers use English with other people for whom it is not a first language, then how relevant are NS pronunciation standards for ELF speakers? Using conversation analysis (CA) as a methodology to examine repair sequences in which ELF speakers ori-

ent to pronunciation as a trouble source, I investigated the way in which ELF speakers modify pronunciation that has been identified as problematic in order to restore mutual intelligibility, which will reveal which aspects of pronunciation are genuinely consequential for interactions among ELF speakers. An analysis of such pronunciation repair sequences will reveal if ELF speakers orient to NS pronunciation standards (in this study defined as standard American English pronunciation standards) during the process of restoring intelligibility. However, it is important to state from the outset that I was not concerned with quantifying instances of phonetic repair; rather I just investigated whether NS pronunciation standards have any relevance to ELF interactions.

Previous Literature

Three strands of research were utilized in this study: ELF, intelligibility, and repair. I argue that a combination of all three aspects allows a detailed study of interactional phonetics—the study of which pronunciations are actually intelligible during an interaction.

English as a Lingua Franca

ELF is the field of study devoted to understanding the praxis of English usage among speakers of different L1 backgrounds for whom English is the communicative medium of choice (Jenkins, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2011). All of the data examined for this paper were collected from ELF interactions. However, it must be pointed out that ELF is not a variety of English, a criticism some scholars have levied against ELF. Rather than being a variety of English, ELF is the study of the vicissitudes and vagaries that appear in contact language situations and that allow ELF speakers to successfully communicate. A critical point to be made here is that ELF does not assume that NS varieties of English are a prerequisite for successful communication.

Intelligibility

Intelligibility refers to how effective pronunciation is in relaying information. If a speaker articulates something and the interlocutor understands it, then the pronunciation is said to be intelligible (Munro, Derwing, & Morton, 2006). A distinction, however, needs to be made between pronunciation intelligibility on the one hand and notions of aural beauty on the other hand. Pronunciation can be effective in the sense that it conveys information, yet still be subjectively considered odd or ugly. This study did not assess how well liked or highly regarded the pronunciation is. This study only assessed whether the pronunciation was intelligible; that is, whether the pronunciation conveyed information and whether the interlocutor understood it.

Many methods have been developed to assess intelligibility. However, most of them utilize some variant of a dictation task. This is an inappropriate way to assess intelligibility, according to scholars who view language study as the study of actual language use, rather than language as used in hermetically sealed and artificial lab experiments (Munro et al., 2006). After all, in a dictation task, someone is asked to write a recorded message in standard orthography, and the extent to which the message can be written is considered an index of how intelligible the message is (Deterding, 2013). However, dictation methods do not assess how intelligible the message was to the intended listener, and it does not reveal how interlocutors manage unintelligible pronunciation. For these reasons, this study did not use dictation methods to assess intelligibility.

Fortunately, there is a method of assessing intelligibility that accepts that pronunciation intelligibility is a negotiable phenomenon. This method, pioneered by Matsumoto (2011), is the only method of assessing intelligibility that accepts that intelligible pronunciation is co-constructed, negotiated, and situationally variable. In this method, which is based on CA methodology, the reaction of the interlocutor is examined to determine the unintelligibility of a word. Furthermore, the repair process by which the conversation partici-

pants modify problematic pronunciation is examined to determine the intelligibility of the word in question.

Conversation Analysis and Repair

CA is an approach to language study that assumes that language use is orderly at minute levels of detail (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977). Furthermore, this orderliness is the product of shared methods of reasoning and understanding among the conversation participants. However, the orderliness of language use does falter, and sometimes the conversation participants momentarily cease to understand each other. It is in such situations that conversation participants perform repair. Repair refers to a set of practices through which conversation participants interrupt the current ongoing course of action to attend to possible and actual trouble sources in speaking, hearing, or understanding the talk (Schegloff, 1992, 1997, 2000, 2007). Although these trouble sources can include malapropisms, wrong words, incorrect understandings, and many other interactional problems, this paper is focused solely on pronunciation trouble sources: both instances of pronunciation treated as a trouble source and the way in which pronunciation trouble sources are repaired.

Not all repair is the same. CA makes a distinction between self-repair and other-repair. Self-repair is initiated by the speaker of the trouble source; the speaker of the trouble source identifies the problem and fixes it. Other-repair, on the other hand, is initiated by someone other than the speaker of the trouble source; the speaker who identifies the problem is not the same person who uttered the trouble source. Both types of pronunciation repair will be seen in the analysis.

Methodology and Corpus Data

CA symbols have been used to transcribe the dialogues (see the Appendix for the transcription symbols). Words that are subject to repair in which pronunciation is part of the repair process are transcribed according to the phonetic symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). However, because both CA and IPA transcription use brackets, some modifications were necessary so that both systems could be used together in a systematic manner. Braces (i.e., { }) are used to indicate simultaneous speech, and phonetic symbols are indicated by brackets (i.e., [ ]).

The corpus of ELF miscommunications assembled for this study, in which miscommunications were defined as repair sequences, was collected from the homework assignments of an English communication course at a national Japanese university. Students from different first language backgrounds were required to record conversations in which they exchanged opinions about topics covered in class. Both Japanese university students and foreign exchange students attended the course. The length of the recordings varied from short interactions of less than 6 minutes to much longer interactions that continued past 30 minutes. The teacher of the course was not present during the recordings, but the students did know that the teacher would listen to the recordings later for the purposes of grading. Pronunciation was not graded. All names in the transcripts are pseudonyms. Although the biological gender, nationality, and academic specialty of each student in the transcripts are listed in the introduction to the excerpts, this is not a tacit claim that any participant actually oriented to biological gender, national origin, or academic specialty as a significant feature of the interaction.

Results

In this section, I examine two representative examples of pronunciation repair among ELF speakers. First, I will identify the word to which one ELF speaker orients as unintelligible and subjects to repair. Then, I will examine the progression of the repair sequence to identify which phonetic changes the ELF speakers made to their pronunciations in the attempt to restore intelligibility.

In Excerpt 1, Matias (a male Chilean exchange student who majors in English, Japanese, and translation studies) and Zhan (a female Taiwanese exchange student who majors in Japanese) are talking about the predilection of some Japanese students to wear what Matias and Zhan consider to be summer clothes during the frigid Niigata winter.

Excerpt 1

1	Matias:	what do you think $$$about.$$$
2		(.)
3	Zhan:	what? hahaha.
4	Matias:	male [klɔθ].
5		(1.9)
6	Zhan:	you mean <Japanese>?
7		(.)
8	Matias:	yeah.
9		(0.4)
10	Zhan:	male [kloʊz]?
11	Matias:	yeah. male [klɔθ].
12		(0.7)
13		I think so. maybe.
14		(.)
15		if you want to spea:k something else.
16		I don't have any {problem. }
17	Zhan:	{I thi:::nk.}
18		(1.6)
19		hm.
20		(1.5)
21		they are so stro:ng (.) to stand the bad
		weather.
22		(0.9)
23		they even don't need to: (.) wear boots.
24		(1.2)
25	Matias:	°uh hm°.
26		(1.3)
27	Zhan:	they- (.) I think they just wear [snik].
28		(0.5)
29		[snikə˖].
30		(.)
31	Matias:	okay::.
32	Zhan:	yeah.

In lines 1-4, Matias begins formulating a question, but Zhan subjects the question to repair twice: first, Zhan clarifies to which category of males Matias refers, and Matias affirms Zhan's clarification (lines 6-8); next, Zhan subjects "male [klɔθ]" to other-repair, which is manifest in the fact that in line 10 Zhan proffers a candidate pronunciation repair, "male [kloʊz]," which Matias can either confirm or reject in his next turn. The fact that Zhan subjects a portion of Matias's utterance to repair shows that Matias and Zhan have ceased to be mutually intelligible to each other. In Matias's next turn in line 11, he confirms "male [kloʊz]" with a single affirmatory "yeah" and then repeats "male [klɔθ]." This brings an end to the first pronunciation other-repair, and Zhan finally answers the question in lines 17-23. This demonstrates that the embedded pronunciation repair sequence and the superordinate question-answer sequence have been brought to a successful conclusion.

However, it is significant how Zhan and Matias orient to the trouble source. Zhan sees it as a pronunciation problem; she repairs [klɔθ] to [kloʊz]. Matias, on the other hand, orients to

the trouble source as a vocabulary problem; he does not repair his pronunciation in his affirmation of Zhan's pronunciation candidate repair, but rather articulates [klɔθ] both before and after the repair. This discrepancy shows that Zhan and Matias orient to the problem in different ways: Zhan as a pronunciation problem and Matias as a vocabulary problem.

In line 27, Zhan adds to her answer and mentions that Japanese students just wear [snik], but Matias does not display any uptake of Zhan's message in line 28. There is just silence. However, Zhan does not react to the silence as if it were a void. In fact, in reaction to the silence in line 28, Zhan self-repairs her own pronunciation to [snikə˗], proffering it as a pronunciation candidate repair for Matias to confirm or reject in his next turn. In line 31, Matias deploys the discourse marker "okay," which claims acceptance of the self-repaired pronunciation. This second example of repair manifests that Zhan oriented to her own pronunciation as potentially unintelligible and self-repaired it to make it more intelligible. Matias's lack of a reaction in line 28, and uptake in line 31, suggest that Zhan's linguistic instincts were correct.

The phonetically interesting aspect of the two pronunciation repairs in Excerpt 1 is that in both the other-repair and the self-repair, a NS pronunciation standard is proffered as the pronunciation candidate repair, which is affirmed by the interlocutor in both cases. That is, in this ELF interaction, NS pronunciation standards were utilized to restore intelligibility in repair sequences twice. This suggests that NS pronunciation standards can be conditionally relevant to the restoration of mutual intelligibility in a repair sequence in ELF interactions.

However, NS pronunciation standards are not always used to restore intelligibility in pronunciation repair sequences. In fact, there are examples in which pronunciations that deviate from NS pronunciation standards restore intelligibility. In the Excerpt 2, Yi (a female Chinese graduate student who majors in education) and Terumi (a female Japanese undergraduate student who majors in economics) have just begun their homework assignment in the early morning, and Yi asks Terumi if she has eaten breakfast yet.

Excerpt 2

1	Yi:	so: did you havu:. (0.6) ee- (0.4) te:- (.) did your eat
2		your [bɹʊk]- (0.5) [bɹɛkəfɛstə]?
3		(1.2)
4	Terumi:	[bɹ]- hn. [bɹʊk]?
5		(0.5)
6	Yi:	[bɹɛ]- [bɹɛkfɛstə].
7		(0.8)
8	Terumi:	[bɹɛdfɛstə].
9		(0.8)
10		what. what is that? hn.
11		(0.9)
12	Yi:	[bɹɛ]- [bɹɛdfɛstə] thing.
13		(2.1)
14	Terumi:	<bɹɛdfɛstə thing>?
15		(.)
16	Yi:	eh [bɹɛdfɛstə] it is: (.) uh kh khn.
17		(0.6)
18		>in the morning< (.) you eat something.
19		(0.7)
20	Terumi:	ah: [bɹɛd]- [bɹɛkfɛstə]?
21	Yi:	yeah.
22	Terumi:	↑ah ah. yeah I- I- I know. I know. (0.5) yeah. I had a [bɹɛkfæst].

In lines 1-2, Yi formulates a question, but Terumi orients to [bɪɛkəfɛstə] as a trouble source in line 4, which catalyzes a repair sequence and demonstrates that mutual intelligibility has faltered. In line 6, Yi self-repairs her pronunciation to [bɪɛkfɛstə], which removes one epenthetic schwa vowel, but in lines 8-10, Terumi manifests that intelligibility has not been restored and asks for an explanation of the trouble source. In lines 16-18, Yi explains to what the trouble source refers, and in line 20, Terumi deploys the discourse marker "ah," which displays a claim that intelligibility has potentially been restored, and then does a confirmation check with the pronunciation candidate repair [bɪɛkfɛstə]. In line 21, Yi confirms the pronunciation, and in line 22, Terumi finally answers the question that was posed in lines 1-2. This shows that the embedded repair sequence and the superordinate question-answer sequence have been brought to a successful conclusion.

The phonetically interesting thing about the second example is that Yi uses [bɪɛdfɛstə] in her explanation of *breakfast* and Terumi uses [bɪɛkfɛstə] in her confirmation of *breakfast*. Neither pronunciation matches the NS pronunciation standard form /bɪɛkfəst/. The fact that both speakers append an additional vowel to the end of the word and still restore intelligibility provides some evidence for Suenobu's (2010) claim that vowel paragoge, or the addition of vowels to the end of a word, can aid intelligibility in ELF. Accordingly, this example demonstrates that pronunciations that deviate from NS pronunciation standards can also be used to restore intelligibility in a repair sequence in which pronunciation is oriented to as a trouble source. It is worth mentioning, however, that Terumi repairs the pronunciation of *breakfast* to "[bɪɛkfæst]" after intelligibility has been restored, which is close to the NS pronunciation standard. Thus, it can be said that even after intelligibility had been restored, at least Terumi was still orienting to NS pronunciation standards in some way.

Discussion

These examples present evidence that NS pronunciation standards can be resources for the restoration of intelligibility in ELF interactions during a repair sequence. Although ELF speakers will probably use English more with other ELF speakers, that alone does not completely invalidate the pedagogical utility of NS pronunciation standards. My claim, that NS pronunciation standards can be resources for the restoration of intelligibility in ELF interactions, however, is not the same as a claim that NS pronunciation standards are omnirelevant standards, deviation from which can be equated to error and approximation to which can be equated to correctness. Outside of repair sequences, NS pronunciation standards are not made conditionally relevant. Even when NS pronunciation standards are made conditionally relevant inside repair sequences in which pronunciation is oriented to as a problem, ELF speakers do not categorically refer to NS pronunciation norms. NS pronunciation standards can be a resource for interaction in ELF. This is significant and true. However, nonnative pronunciations can also be a resource for interaction in ELF. This is also significant and true.

A more accurate name for NS pronunciation standards would be *referential pronunciation*. This is because NS pronunciation standards are not required to be an intelligible speaker of English. However, when intelligibility falters, and a repair sequence has begun, NS pronunciation standards can be used as referents to intended meanings. NS pronunciation standards should not be called standards because deviation from these standards is often interactionally insignificant. However, the appellation *pronunciation referent* is more than warranted. NS pronunciation standards can be a resource to restore intelligibility. Teachers should call NS pronunciation referential pronunciation, not correct pronunciation, because it is not. Intelligible pronunciation in ELF is negotiated in interaction; it is not set beforehand (Matsumoto, 2011).

However, it must also be pointed out that NS pronunciation is not necessarily the only pronunciation that can be used to reestab-

lish intelligibility. Excerpt 2 demonstrates that pronunciation that deviates from NS pronunciation standards can also restore intelligibility. Accordingly, NS pronunciation standards are not the only intelligible types of pronunciation and not even the only referential pronunciations.

Conclusion

Language is a syncretic phenomenon, and all languages are creoles to one extent or another (Canagarajah, 2013). As any history of language contact shows us, languages are not neat, easily delineable entities, but rather porous linguistic amoebas (Ostler, 2010). Although most would accept language change as a natural, even an inevitable phenomenon over years, the idea that language change is emergent and insipient in the moment-by-moment decisions that permeate interaction may not be accepted as true. However, the praxis of ELF interactions demonstrates that it is true, and one facet of language change that is subject to the exigent circumstances of communication is pronunciation. Intelligible pronunciation is emergent within the interaction and is variable across speakers. Intelligible pronunciation is determined by the willingness of speakers to adjust their speech according to the needs to the situation, not to the dictates of any single pronunciation standard, native or otherwise.

Bio Data

George O'Neal teaches at Niigata University. His research interests include conversation analysis, English as a lingua franca, and phonology. He also sneaks the word "vicissitudes" into every article he writes. <cerebralabstraction@gmail.com>

References

Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Deterding, D. (2013). *Misunderstandings in English as a lingua franca*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2002). A sociolinguistically based, empirically researched pronunciation syllabus for English as an international language. *Applied Linguistics, 23*, 83-103.

Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2009). *World Englishes: A resource book for students* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Jenkins, J. (2014). *English as a lingua franca in the international university*. New York: Routledge.

Matsumoto, Y. (2011). Successful ELF communications and implications for ELT: Sequential analysis of ELF pronunciation negotiation strategies. *The Modern Language Journal, 95*, 97-114.

Munro, M., Derwing, T., & Morton, S. (2006). The mutual intelligibility of L2 speech. *Studies in second language acquisition, 28*, 111-131.

Ostler, N. (2010). *The last lingua franca*. New York: Penguin.

Schegloff, E. (1992). Repair after next turn: The last structurally provided defense of intersubjectivity in conversation. *American Journal of Sociology, 97*, 1295-1345.

Schegloff, E. (1997). Third turn repair. In G. Guy, C. Feagin, D. Schiffrin, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *Towards a social science of language: Papers in honor of William Labov. Volume 2: Social interaction and discourse structures* (pp. 31-40). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Schegloff, E. (2000). When 'others' initiate repair. *Applied Linguistics, 21*, 205-243.

Schegloff, E. (2007). *Sequence organization in interaction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schegloff, E., Jefferson, G., & Sacks, H. (1977). The preference for self-correction in the organization of repair in conversation. *Language, 53*, 361-382.

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Suenobu, M. (2010). *Nihoneigo ha sekai de tsujiru* [Japanese English is intelligible to the world]. Tokyo: Heibonsha.

Appendix

Transcription Symbols

Symbol	Represents
{ }	overlapping speech
[ ]	speech in the phonetic transcription of the IPA
=	latched utterance (e.g., no silence between the utterances)
(.)	micro silence (e.g., less than one tenth of a second of silence)
(1.5)	a timed silence (e.g., a one and a half seconds of silence)
hahaha	laughter
–	sudden cut off of speech
:	elongated sound
.	falling intonation
,	slightly rising intonation
?	rising intonation
↑	sudden increase in pitch
word	speech that is said with volume higher than the surrounding speech
$word$	speech that is said while laughing
°word°	speech that is saliently quieter than the surrounding speech
>word<	speech that is said saliently faster than the surrounding speech
<word>	speech that is said saliently slower than the surrounding speech