

**THE ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS TOWARDS THE ROLE OF  
ACCENT AND INTELLIGIBILITY IN PRONUNCIATION  
TEACHING IN TAIWAN**

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**Introduction**

The government in Taiwan is running a nation-wide project to raise the island's importance in the Asia-Pacific region in the domains of economy, finance, and politics. To meet this goal, English, the most commonly used foreign/second language and lingua franca among the nations in this region, is a vital asset and needs to be taught as an international language, frequently spoken by those who do not share the same mother tongues. To facilitate the achievement of this goal, the educational authorities have decided to reform the current English teaching in the regular system and start the teaching of English two years earlier – that is, in the fifth grade of primary schools by the autumn of 2001. Currently English is taught from the first year of the junior high school when the learners are thirteen years of age (according to the Ministry of Education over one million and ninety thousand boys and girls). The system is examinations-led, with only those who have achieved satisfactory test results in English at the end of their junior high school education, being allowed to proceed further. Any emphasis in the schools on pronunciation teaching is aimed at enabling the learners to get high marks in their examinations, not for the sake of improving their speaking and listening competencies. The emphasis is on accurate pronunciation of the phonetic symbols so that learners can achieve a high exam mark and coincidentally this is also supportive of the acquisition of listening and speaking skills, although this is not the main aim. As the use of English in the future for the Taiwanese, will increasingly be for communication with other non-native and native speakers of English outside Taiwan, the importance of intelligibility on the part of the speaker and listener will become very important. The new English language policy due to be implemented in 2001, has involved curricular changes and changes to the textbook - new textbooks were introduced into junior high schools in 1997 with a much greater emphasis on speaking and listening. Second language learners are seen as needing to use English with a variety of different interlocutors in many different contexts, both inside and outside



Taiwan. And for many, poor pronunciation can be seen as impeding successful communication although what exactly is meant by "correct" pronunciation is problematic. In this article, I will explore some of the issues associated with pronunciation teaching and investigate how teachers in Taiwan value pronunciation and how they teach it.

### **Pronunciation – accent and intelligibility**

Sweet (1899:38) states that 'the first aim of foreigners who come to England is to understand the natives and make themselves understood by them.' To understand the 'natives' one needs to be able to comprehend the language signals, such as the sound system, vocabulary, and cultural references and so on. The need to decode and to pronounce the sounds of native speakers led to the development of phonology teaching in ELT.

But as English has nowadays become more an international language, the complexity of its worldwide varieties has blurred the notion of a native-like accent. Jenkins (1998:119) states that many of her colleagues working in the pronunciation area have started to challenge both the goal of EFL as 'communication with its native speakers' and 'the target of pronunciation teaching as a native-like accent.' She points out that English is more frequently used among non-native speakers (NNS) of different L1s than it is used among native speakers (NSs) and NNSs (Jenkins:1996a). She claims that many of her colleagues teaching or doing research on pronunciation feel that the original objective of teaching EFL, to communicate with NSs, should be changed to cope with the development of EIL and the new goal of pronunciation teaching therefore should be revised to promote mutual intelligibility rather than to acquire a native-like accent. Quirk (1990) however argues that standard English is necessary as a goal for reasons for efficient and mutual intelligibility although he questions what should be regarded as the standard pronunciation of so-called Standard English. Is it Received Pronunciation (RP) which was first proposed by Alexander Ellis in 1869 in Britain (Mompean 1997), the motherland of English? Or General American (GA) which is the perception, according to Wells (1982:470), 'of an American accent without marked regional characteristics'? Or an international accent 'without marked regional characteristics,' which would be acceptable to most English varieties in the whole world? Roach (1983:188) points out:

'Australian English has the same set of phonemes and phonemic contrasts as RP, yet Australian pronunciation is so different from RP.....A word of caution should be given here: it is all too easy to talk about such things as



“Australian English”, and ignore the great variety that inevitably exists within such a large community of speakers. Every individual’s speech is different from any other’s; it follows from this that no one speaker can be taken to represent a particular accent or dialect, and it also follows that the idea of a “standard Received Pronunciation” is a convenient fiction, not a scientific fact.’

Nevertheless, Crystal (1999:16) is more optimistic than Roach at this point and foresees that ‘one day there will additionally be an international standard of spoken English, to be used as a means of international communication in an increasingly diversified world.’ The ‘international standard of spoken English’ however is not a specific accent but a kind of speech that copes with two criteria: intelligibility and identity. In the next sections I look further into the paradox of the ultimate goal of pronunciation teaching and discuss what it should be in the current EIL context, a native-like accent or intelligibility?

### Acquiring a Native-like Accent

To acquire a native-like accent while learning pronunciation of a language has strong historic support dating back to the nineteenth century. Daniel Jones’ book ‘*An Outline of English Phonetics*,’ (1918) which has had nine editions and has been reprinted over a dozen times since 1918, contributed a major push towards this notion. However, he suggested that several difficulties need to be surmounted to acquire a correct pronunciation and a good ear seems to be essential in doing so. Trying to help students, especially NNSs, to pronounce like a NS, seems to be influenced by several factors such as age of learners and attitude towards the target language (TL) (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982; Kenworthy 1987).

### *A Good Ear*

When providing suggestions for language learners to surmount difficulties of pronunciation, Jones (1918) thinks that a good ear whether given or trained can definitely help them to pronounce accurately. In his words, a good ear consists of three main abilities: ‘ability to discriminate between sounds,’ ‘ability to remember the acoustic qualities of foreign sounds,’ and ‘ability to recognise foreign sound with ease and certainty’ (Jones 1918:3) and in similar vein Kenworthy (1997:6) sees a ‘good ear’ as including an ‘aptitude for oral mimicry,’ ‘phonetic coding ability,’ or ‘auditory discrimination ability’. A learner with a good ear can therefore tell the differences between sounds, memorise the sounds when they



are produced, and understand the words when hearing them. Jones (1918) believed that these abilities could be promoted by training and moreover training will make a good ear even better. However, Neufeld (1978) found in a study involving twenty adult subjects that after eighteen hours of intensive training in Chinese and Japanese pronunciation only *three* of them were able to pronounce like native speakers although *one* of them could do this in the two languages. This result, on the one hand, suggests that learners with a good ear and thorough training can acquire a native-like pronunciation but that not everyone has 'a good ear' since most of the subjects did not acquire a native-speaker accent.

### ***Age and attitude***

Sweet (1899:44) suggests that 'the study of phonetics should begin at an early age' because 'It gives a command of the organs of speech which has a most beneficial effect on the learner's pronunciation.' In short, the younger the learners are, the easier they can acquire new sounds. And this earlier conclusion remains true today when most research supports the idea that as far as *accent* is concerned the "earlier the better" ()

Attitudes also play a role in how well learners acquire accurate pronunciation. Of the many different attitudes that learners may have towards the target language, its community, the language learning situation such as teachers, courses and classrooms, Kenworthy (1987) notes that positive attitudes towards the TL and group affiliation will greatly motivate a learner's ambition to acquire accurate pronunciation.

### ***Constraints on Acquiring TL Pronunciation***

Given a young age and positive attitudes, there are however major difficulties in terms of L1 interference, social and psychological influence and maturational constraints. According to Kenworthy(1987) possible problems and difficulties for learners in the area of pronunciation are not only due to differences between L1 and L2 phonemes but also to differences in rhythm and intonation. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) think that the learners when acquiring the L2 tend to compare the new sounds with the L1 articulation in mind. As a result, they use the familiar sounds in mind as a reference point for articulating the new ones. The more the differences, the greater the difficulty. Hence, a person whose L1 is Chinese will inevitably have many difficulties in learning English pronunciation because the sounds system of these two languages differ greatly. In addition, Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994:9) also point out that despite living in a foreign language country and being able to manage the foreign language very well, many adults usually keep a unique accent 'with the



phonetic characteristics of their first language.'

Whilst positive attitudes towards TL will encourage language learners to try to pronounce like a NS, negative attitudes will discourage learners. Wong (1987) finds that some of the negative attitudes are caused by attempts to pronounce 'perfectly'. For example, some students think that to rectifying their pronunciation is a kind of threat or challenge to their identity. Stern (1992:87-99) provides several indications of students' negative attitudes such as the feeling that TL is strange, odd and annoying, and the demonstration of hostility or no interest towards TL community and culture. According to Kenworthy (1987), these negative attitudes which are an indication of the learners' lack of interest in the TL speakers and culture and their unwillingness to be integrated into the speech community, will prevent learners from acquiring a more accurate or native-like accent.

#### **Intelligibility . communication and pronunciation**

As we have seen, many barriers to the acquisition of a native-like pronunciation exist and only a small proportion of learners in the EFL context are able to acquire a native-like accent. Thus many have re-examined the objectives of pronunciation teaching. Stern (1992:16) when discussing the objectives of pronunciation teaching, points out 'the goal, in most cases, should be intelligibility and acceptability rather than native-like perfection'. There is however no one universally accepted definition of 'intelligibility'. Munro and Derwing define it as "the extent to which a speaker's message is actually understood by a listener" 1999:289, but admit there are a variety of different ways of assessing it. They emphasise that accent and intelligibility are not identical aspects and that listeners may rate an accent as "difficult" whilst rating the comprehension of the message as "good". Nevertheless, as English varieties increase, to what extent different phonetic patterns hinder mutual intelligibility is crucial. Bansal found that :

'mutual intelligibility in English between Indians of different mother tongues was around 74% (compared with 97 per cent between RP speaking English people). British listeners understood Indian English almost as well (or badly) as Indian listeners (70-73 %); Nigerian listeners found it considerably more difficult to understand (53 per cent intelligibility) as did Germans (57 %)'

(Bansal 1969:11 cited in Wells 1982:632)

It is obvious that there is a need to improve the phonologically mutual intelligibility



among different varieties so that English can maintain its role in international communication.

However the relationship between pronunciation and intelligibility is complex. Dalton and Seidlhofer, point out that to understand an utterance is 'not just a matter of accurate and clear articulation,' but that several questions 'such as "Why do we talk?", "What determines how we talk to whom?", and "Which factors might be of help or hindrance to getting our meaning across?" need to be taken into account.

'If we reflect upon how pronunciation works to make communication possible, we do not need to rely primarily on native speakers as models and arbiters of 'correctness'... Hence, the relevant question to ask is not: what is correct in relation to a native-speaker norm (RP or otherwise), but: what is appropriate and necessary to be able to communicate in specific situations?'

Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994:9

And Munro and Derwing in their investigation of L2 speech evaluation, found that 'although strength of foreign accent is indeed correlated with comprehensibility and intelligibility, a strong foreign accent does not necessarily cause L2 speech to be low in comprehensibility or intelligibility. .... scales of accent, perceived comprehensibility, and intelligibility ought not to be confused with one another'. Munro and Derwing (1999:305)

### **Improving Intelligibility**

If an appropriate objective of pronunciation teaching is intelligibility, there is a need to clarify what improves intelligibility so that teaching can focus upon relevant aspects. Kenworthy (1987:14) notes that important factors in intelligibility are: 'counts of sameness;' speech habits such as 'self-corrections, hesitations, and grammatical restructuring;' 'features like word and sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation;' 'listener's familiarity with the foreign accent;' and 'the listener's ability to use contextual clues when listening.' In these factors suprasegmentals<sup>1</sup> play an important role. However, when considering the EIL context, Jenkins (1998) thinks that although to a native listener the suprasegmentals are more helpful to intelligibility than are the segmentals<sup>2</sup> (sounds), it is necessary to maintain a balance between the teaching areas of segmentals and

<sup>1</sup> Suprasegmentals = rhythm, intonation, stress

<sup>2</sup> Segmentals = sounds at the level of phonemes



suprasegmentals with regard to the complicating factors in interlanguage talk. To improve learners' intelligibility in the EIL context, therefore the 'productive focus of pronunciation teaching' should concentrate on three areas, 'certain segmentals, nuclear stress (the main stress in a word group), and the effective use of articulatory setting... Other aspects of pronunciation can then be dealt with purely at a receptive level'.

### **Teachers and their attitudes towards pronunciation**

There is no doubt that within English language teaching, there is a renewed interest in the role that pronunciation and accent play in intelligibility. In Taiwan, where English is only one of the major foreign languages and its learners do not receive regular English education in school until thirteen years of age, it is especially true that intelligibility should take over from the acquisition of a native-like accent as the ultimate goal for pronunciation teaching.

The purpose of my research amongst Taiwanese teachers was to collect information on the attitudes of English teachers in junior high school in Taiwan towards pronunciation and their knowledge of pronunciation teaching, and the difficulties they may encounter in their teaching practices. To achieve this goal a questionnaire (See Appendix A) was designed which aimed to:

- investigate how English teachers in the Taiwanese context value pronunciation and practice their teaching.
- assess what value English teachers place upon pronunciation in their context.
- explore the ways in which English teachers say they teach pronunciation and how far they feel able to cope with the approach to pronunciation in the new textbooks.

#### *The questionnaire – design and administration*

The questionnaire comprised twenty-nine items and was divided into three sections:

Section I: Teacher's Attitude towards Pronunciation. (11 items)

Section II: Teaching Practice. (11 items)

Section III: Subject's Background Information. (7 items)

To obtain more useful information, six open-ended items were also included.

The subjects of this research were 36 English instructors teaching in junior high schools in both north and mid-Taiwan. Twenty one were from either Taipei city or Taoyuan county and fifteen from either Taichun or Hualian counties. The subjects in Taipei city were only part of the English language teaching staff in a junior high school and those from the



Taoyuan county were from five different schools; in the region of mid-Taiwan the respondents comprised all the English teachers in two junior high schools in Taichun and Haulian respectively.

In relation to gender distribution, only eight per cent of the subjects were male English teachers and ninety-two per cent of them were female. Their ages ranged from twenty-two to forty-nine years old with most (44%) between thirty to thirty-nine.

As to their teaching experience, the distribution ranges are quite even. Thirty-three per cent of them had five or fewer years of teaching experience and thirty-six per cent had more than eleven years of experience. The rest had experience varying between six to eleven years. Fifty-two per cent of the subjects earned their bachelor degree in the normal universities where career teachers are educated in Taiwan; thirty-one per cent of the subjects however did not study to be an English teacher in their university. Seventeen per cent of the subjects had a master's degree.

### **Results**

Two years ago the educational authorities in Taiwan introduced the teaching of pronunciation based on a phonics approach into English textbooks used in junior high school. Many teachers however did not receive any systematic introduction to the new system and two thirds complained that they were not given enough time to build up a knowledge of phonics teaching to enable them to cope with the demands of the new system. The teachers' past training in phonetics, phonology and pronunciation practice had been varied but on average only one third of them had had previous experience of any of these areas. Given that such training had taken place many years previously, it is perhaps not surprising that teachers felt uncertain and underconfident when dealing with pronunciation and phonics.

#### **Teacher's Attitude towards Pronunciation**

In this section, the eleven items, three open and eight closed ended questions, were designed to clarify the respondents' attitude towards pronunciation. The results are discussed in the following paragraphs.

In Chart 1 the results of the first four items of this section are listed together. The four



questions are:

1. Pronunciation is an essential aspect of learning English.
2. Pronunciation is important in the beginning stage of learning English.
3. Accurate pronunciation can result in good speaking performance.
4. Accurate pronunciation can result in good listening performance.

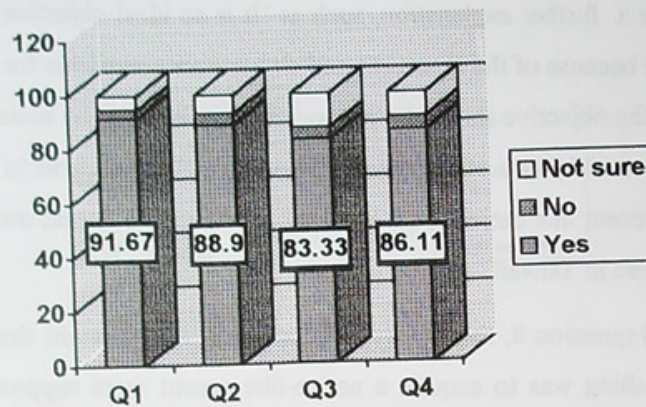


Chart 1 The Results of Question 1 to 4

The results reveal that 91%<sup>1</sup> of the respondents agree that pronunciation is an essential aspect of learning English; 88% of them felt that pronunciation is important particularly at the initial stage; 83% of them think that accurate pronunciation results in a good speaking performance and 86% believe accurate pronunciation results in a good listening performance. Only a very small percentage of the teachers did not agree with or were not sure about the four statements.

Questions 6, 7 and 8 are three items designed to clarify the respondents' opinion about the objective of accurate pronunciation. They are:

Q6. The objective of accurate pronunciation is to acquire a native-like accent.

Q7. If your answer to question 6 is either 'No.' or 'Not sure.', please specify the objective in your mind.

Q8. If your answer to question 6 is 'Yes.', please specify the 'native accent' that you have in mind

<sup>1</sup> percentages are rounded up in text



In question 6 (Q6 as in Chart 2), 63.% of the teachers agree that the objective of accurate pronunciation is to acquire a native-like accent while the rest (36%) either do not think so (33.%) or answer 'Not sure' (3%). Of the thirteen respondents who did not agree with the statement, only eleven of them wrote down the objectives that they thought appropriate for pronunciation practice. The three categories that these responses fall under are 'communication' (four subjects), 'understandability' (four subjects), and 'a native-like accent is not an appropriate objective for pronunciation teaching' (three subjects). Some respondents gave a further explanation, such as 'It is an ideal objective but is difficult to achieve at present because of the resources and circumstance available for English language teaching. Hence, the objective should be communication followed by accuracy and fluency.' This point is supported by two other subjects saying that 'For students in Taiwan it is quite hard to learn an accent like native speakers,' and 'a native-like accent may be too "strict" a standard for learners in Taiwan.'

As to open-ended question 8, the twenty-three subjects who thought that the objective of pronunciation teaching was to acquire a native-like accent were supposed to specify the 'native accent' that they had in mind. Twelve of them chose not to answer. Five of the rest gave a specific name, an *American* accent, as their answer. However, the other six subjects who also answered this question did not suggest any particular accents as the appropriate 'native' accent but wrote down some vague definition such as 'the accent that most NSs speak,' 'the accent that is natural and fluent,' and 'the accent that could be understood well by NSs.'

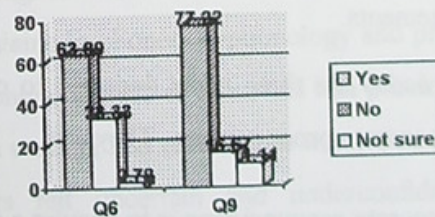


Chart 2: The results for Q6 and Q9

In question 9, the respondents are asked to answer whether or not L1 influence will hinder students' learning of accurate English pronunciation. As shown in the above Chart 2, 72% (twenty-six respondents) of them agree that L1 is an obstacle to acquiring accurate



pronunciation. Only a small proportion of them either answer 'No' (17%) or 'Not sure' (11%).

Those who answered 'Yes' in question 9 were invited in question 10 (see Chart 3 below) to give their opinion as to whether or not they would mind if their students spoke English with a foreign (Chinese) accent. Over half the teachers did not mind if their students spoke English with a Chinese accent while the other 20% of them thought that their students needed to learn accurate pronunciation.

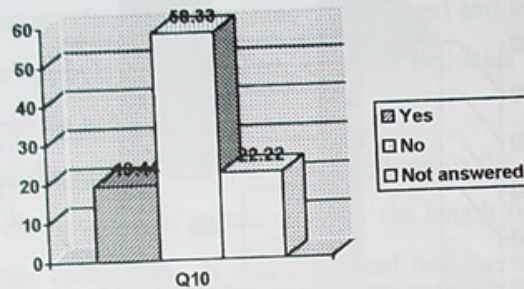


Chart 3 : Answers to question 10

Question 11, 'Teachers should allow for differences in their students' pronunciation, such as their pronunciation of the same vowel or consonant,' was designed to reveal whether or not the subjects would allow for pronunciation differences among their students. 64% of the teachers thought 'Yes' while 28% replied 'No.' A small number were uncertain as to whether they should tolerate students' pronunciation differences. Whilst the number who thought they would tolerate such differences, the surprising result is the number of teachers who felt that their learners should all aim for a similar and presumably 'correct' pronunciation.

#### Teaching Practice of the respondents

The third section of this questionnaire contains items related to teaching practice in the classroom and is divided into five main categories with eight closed questions and three open ended ones. Because the educational authorities in Taiwan introduced new English textbooks into the junior high school two years ago (the official edition was published in 1998) and these books contain pronunciation activities (including phonics, rhythm,



intonation, stress) the attitudes of the teachers to these books is relevant. Hence, most of these items were designed to understand the classroom interaction among textbooks, teachers and students, especially the aspect of pronunciation teaching.

In category A, two questions were asked:

1. Do you think that phonics is useful?
2. Do you think that your students like it?

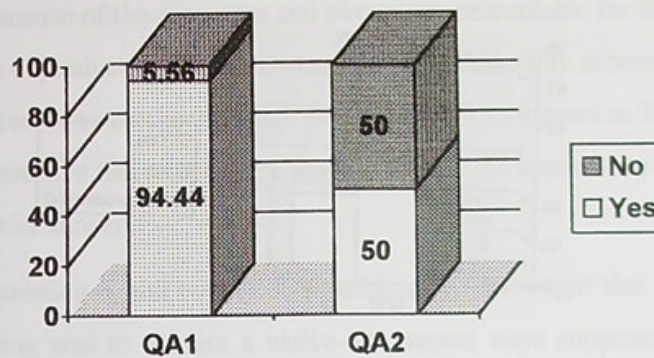


Chart 4: The results for Q A1 and Q A2

Overwhelmingly, for question A1, 94% of the respondents agreed that phonics was useful. However, when considering whether or not their students liked this approach only half of the teachers could confidently say 'Yes'. The practice of phonics in reality is single word pronunciation – the words being grouped according to similar sounds (e.g. *er* as in teacher:brother:mister). Perhaps it is not surprising that learners do not particularly enjoy this rather meaningless exercise; rather more surprising is the finding that the teachers think this is a useful practice for improving their learners' pronunciation.

The new textbooks invite some practice in rhythm through the use of songs and chants. Hence, in the category B, the third and fourth questions were:

3. Do you think that this kind of practice is useful?
4. Do you think that your students like it?



94.% of the teachers agreed that practice of this kind is useful in pronunciation teaching while for question B4, 75% of the subjects thought that their students liked it and the other 25% of them seem unconvinced.

When invited to specify what activities would motivate learners with respect to pronunciation, fourteen provided a list of activities. This list included jazz chants, role play, minimal pairs, games, tongue twisters, narrating poems and stories, telling jokes, singing songs, applying multimedia, teaching phonics and phonetic symbols, and using English characters to spell Mandarin or Taiwanese. Most of these activities are mentioned only once except for jazz chants (four times), games (three times) and songs, minimal pairs, and phonics and phonetic symbols (twice). Few of these activities occur in the textbooks however with the exception of the last two.

In category E of the questionnaire, it was explained to the respondents that native speakers distinguish the meaning of words more by the length (long or short) of vowels rather than their quality (accuracy). It was suggested that the teaching of pronunciation should therefore prioritize certain features. The questions were as follows:

10. Do you think that teaching pronunciation according to this kind of priority will help your students' in the learning of English pronunciation?

11. If you have any priority when teaching pronunciation in mind, please specify.

75% of the respondents agreed that the priority mentioned in category E would help their students but it was evident that the teachers themselves had not been able to prioritize in this way. Finally, the last question invited respondents to provide their own priorities when teaching pronunciation. However, only five teachers gave their opinions. They are:

1. If a teacher can focus on 'vowel length' and 'quality' simultaneously, students can benefit a lot from this kind of teaching technique.
2. Learning how to pronounce a whole word is more important than learning individual sounds.
3. We need training in accurate pronunciation because we do not have much exposure to English.
4. While reading, read aloud. If there is a tape, imitate the sound clearly and practice these methods every day.

The low response to this item suggests that perhaps many teachers have not considered the



teaching of pronunciation as a matter of great importance. It seems as if teachers act intuitively in the area of pronunciation teaching but have little solid theoretical knowledge to back their judgement. There was little evidence that the concept of intelligibility as against accurate pronunciation was a priority.

### **Summary of results**

Overall the teachers' attitude towards pronunciation is very positive in that most of them believe that pronunciation is essential and is important at the beginning stage of learning English. Moreover, the majority also think that accurate pronunciation has much to do with good speaking and listening performance. When asked about the objectives of pronunciation, a great deal of them still think that it should be to acquire a native-like accent. However, when further asked what the 'native-like accent' should be, only five subjects gave a specific term 'American accent.' The results of these two connected items suggest that although most teachers intuitively believe that the objective of pronunciation should be to acquire a native-like accent, very few of them can point out what the native accent actually is in the context of English as an international language. The fact that there are many countries and their people use English as their L1, causes the respondents to hesitate to recommend any particular native accent. The answer of one subject, 'the accent that most NSs speak,' is understandable and of course there are many other factors that need to be taken into account, but it would seem that many teachers do not have a clear idea regarding the standard 'native accent.' In other words, when claiming that the objective of accurate pronunciation is to acquire a native-like accent, they do not have a clear image of a *particular* accent in mind.

Another focus of the second section was whether or not these subjects notice the L1 (Chinese) influence while their students are learning English pronunciation. The results show that most teachers know the L1 will hinder their students' learning of accurate English pronunciation and so they would not mind if their students spoke English with a Chinese accent. Even the differences in students' pronunciation of the same vowel or consonant are tolerable to many of the subjects despite about one fifth of them still insisting that their students need to learn accurate pronunciation regardless of the L1 influence. This tolerance for a slightly 'deviant' accent is perhaps not entirely shared in the wider context. Griffen (1991:182) stated categorically that the "goal of instruction in pronunciation is that the student should learn to speak the language as naturally as possible, free of any



indication that the speaker is not a clinically normal native (sic)". And there are indeed "accent reduction programmes" because there is often a prejudice against foreign accents in speech. Native-speaker listeners can react adversely to certain foreign accents and Sato(1991) claims employers are often intolerant of foreign accents. Because of this, the notion of intelligibility as against a 'correct' accent has sometimes not been realised in classroom practice.

The results in section three revealed some interesting points worth noticing. Firstly, in the new textbooks of junior high school in Taiwan phonics play an important role in pronunciation teaching. Almost everyone except two subjects thought that phonics was useful but only half of them think that their students liked it. Similarly, the majority of these teachers think the practice of rhythm useful but still one quarter of them did not think that their students would like it. The contradiction between whether or not phonics and rhythm practices are useful and whether or not students would like them shows that some problems exist in the classroom teaching of pronunciation in this context. It is curious that they thought these practices were useful if they knew their students would not like or enjoy the activity. I suspect the reason may be that when we mention pronunciation, many teachers automatically think 'phonics' – without perhaps questioning whether such a practice actually does lead to improvements in pronunciation.

When asked whether or not more types of activities should be introduced to motivate students' learning of pronunciation, three quarters of the subjects agree. And certainly the range of activities that enable learners to practise pronunciation are limited to mainly phonic drills and pronunciation practice of single words; with very little guidance on stress and intonation which are of such crucial importance in intelligibility.

## DISCUSSION

It would seem that for many teachers the aim of pronunciation teaching should be to acquire a native-like accent although there is little agreement as to what this 'native-like' accent should be. Hence, the so-called 'native-like accent' is more like a personal concept than a classroom reality among the teachers. Equally most teachers see that pronunciation is important only in so far as it increases intelligibility – they are open to suggestions regarding prioritization in pronunciation teaching. But lack of knowledge may be holding



them back from making informed decisions as to what is important and what is not important in improving intelligibility

The approval of teachers for drills although they felt learners did not enjoy them is revealing – there is little evidence that exposure to drills and practice through drills improves pronunciation. As Munro and Derwing point out “.. little empirical evidence indicates which particular aspects of foreign-accented speech are most detrimental to comprehensibility and intelligibility. As a result, instructors are left without much guidance as to what to teach or how to teach it” (1999:305.) Both the textbook and the teachers’ attitudes suggest a certain “dancing in the dark” regarding how to teach pronunciation . The lack of guidance given to teachers regarding how to teach pronunciation is not, however, unique to Taiwan. Methodologies on pronunciation teaching are not always derived from empirical research and until we can be sure what aspects of pronunciation actually affect intelligibility it will remain difficult to recommend to teachers what procedures to use when teaching.

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## Appendix A

### Questionnaire

An Investigation into How Teachers and Textbooks Deal with the Pronunciation Teaching in Junior High Schools in Taiwan

#### Section I: Background Information

1. Sex:  
 Male      Female
2. Age:  
 22-29      30-39      40-49      50-59      60 or above
3. Teaching Experience:  
 5 years and below      6-10 years      11 years and above
4. Educational Background:  
 Ph.D.    MA.    BA (Normal universities)    BA (other universities)    others
5. Which of the subjects related to pronunciation have you taken?  
 Phonetics    Phonology    Pronunciation Practice    Others
6. Which kind of pronunciation system did you learn when you started to learn English?  
 KK phonetic symbol      Phonics      others
7. Do you think that the educational authorities have provided plenty of time for you to build up enough knowledge of phonics before you started to teach the new pronunciation system?  
 Yes.                      No.

#### Section II: Teacher's Attitude towards Pronunciation

Please circle your answer. Needing to specify your answers, you are welcomed to use either Chinese or English.

1. Pronunciation is an essential aspect of learning English.  
 Yes.              No.              Not sure.
2. Pronunciation is important in the beginning stage of learning English.  
 Yes.              No.              Not sure.
3. Accurate pronunciation can result in good speaking performance.  
 Yes.              No.              Not sure.
4. Accurate pronunciation can result in good listening performance.  
 Yes.              No.              Not sure.
5. If your answers to the third and/or fourth questions are either 'No.' or 'Not sure.', please specify in which areas do you think that accurate pronunciation can help students?
6. The objective of accurate pronunciation is to acquire a native-like accent.  
 Yes.              No.              Not sure.
7. If your answer to question 6 is either 'No.' or 'Not sure.', please specify the objective in your mind.
8. If your answer to question 6 is 'Yes.', please specify the 'native accent' that you have in mind.
9. The L1 (mother tongue) influence will hinder students' learning of accurate English pronunciation.  
 Yes.              No.              Not sure.
10. If your answer to question 9 is 'Yes.', would you mind if your students speak English with a foreign (Chinese) accent?  
 Yes, they still need to learn accurate pronunciation.                      No, I do not mind.



11. Teachers should allow differences in students' pronunciation, such as their different pronunciation to the same vowel or consonant.

Yes. No. Not sure.

**Section III : Teaching Practice**

A. In the new textbooks, phonics is one of the major practices of pronunciation:

- 1. Do you think that phonics is useful? Yes. No.
- 2. Do you think that your students like it? Yes. No.

B. The new textbooks introduce the practice of rhythm, including songs, dialogues and so on:

- 3. Do you think that this kind of practice is useful? Yes. No.
- 4. Do you think that your students like it? Yes. No.

C. The new textbooks adopt an integrated approach to practice pronunciation. For example, they use both the phonetic (bottom-up approach) and rhythm (top-down approach) drills:

- 5. Do you think that the integration of both kinds of drills is useful?  
Yes. No.

6. If your answer to the above question is 'No.', please specify what combinations of pronunciation drills you think are useful?

D. The new textbooks use mainly rhythm and phonics drills to practice pronunciation:

- 7. Do you think that the arrangement of these drills in the new textbooks is appropriate?  
Yes. No.

- 8. Do you think that more types of activities should be introduced so that your students would be motivated to learn pronunciation? Yes. No.

9. Please specify what activities would motivate the learning of pronunciation. Thank you.

E. Some linguists suggest that a priority of teaching pronunciation will help students' learning. For example: native speakers distinguish meaning of words by the quantity (long or short) of vowel rather than its quality (accuracy) so the teaching of vowel quantity should be prior to that of quality.

- 10. Do you think that teaching pronunciation according to this kind of priority will help your students' learning? Yes. No.

- 11. If you have any priority of teaching pronunciation in mind, please specify.

**Thank you for your time and co-operation. Your help has greatly facilitated the progress of this research.**