

# Study calls for new approach to teaching English as a lingua franca

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A study at the University of Leicester highlights the need for a new approach to the teaching of English pronunciation given that English is now a lingua franca, with more non-native speakers in the world than native speakers.

It suggests that the emphasis on ‘correct’ pronunciation of [English](#) as depicted in films like ‘My Fair Lady’ and ‘the King and I’ should be discontinued in favour mutual intelligibility among non-native speakers, as well as celebrating the national identity of non-native speakers.

Therefore a Chinese or Indian speaker of English need not seek to ‘disguise’ his or her origins in seeking to speak English ‘properly’ - instead they should feel free to speak with their dialects and accents intact so long as what they said was clear and intelligible.

Research presented at the University of Leicester’s Festival of Postgraduate Research highlights the emphasis based on replicating the phonology of native speakers - and suggests instead that an intelligibility-oriented approach to pronunciation teaching would be more appropriate.

Doctoral student, Wafa Zoghbor from the School of Education said, “I was taught English as a foreign language and after years of learning Standard English pronunciation I found a wide gap between the target I have been trying to achieve and the level of intelligibility required to communicate effectively. Very few users of English today would claim that aiming at native-like pronunciation is necessary or even desirable. I

hope that my contribution to this field can challenge the existing stereotypes of teaching English pronunciation. ”

Her research explores the notion that teaching native pronunciation might eliminate a significant indicator of an individual’s identity. She said, “We recognise Indian, South African, Egyptian and Chinese speakers from their accents. As long as they are intelligible and have the potential to communicate effectively there should be no reason for them not to retain their accents - something which they might like to do as this accent carries their identity, ethnicity and indicates the group of people they belong to.”

The study expands on the work of Dr Jennifer Jenkins from the University of Southampton who proposed a list of pronunciation features which are the minimum requirement for intelligible communication among non-native English language speakers.

Zoghbor’s research compares the speech of two groups of Arab learners, those who were taught pronunciation material based on the phonological features suggested by Dr. Jenkins, and those who have used traditional pronunciation models based on native-speaker varieties.

Zoghbor said, “English usage is expanding - every five years it gets bigger; in 2008 there were three times as many non-native English language speakers as native speakers, and therefore you can no longer say that everyone in the world is using the language incorrectly apart from the inner core of native speakers. When using English as a lingua franca what matters more than native-like pronunciation is intelligibility.”

She suggests that the goal of pronunciation teaching needs to be switched from achieving native-like pronunciation to aiming for intelligibility during communication, whilst at the same time preserving an individual’s

identity.

“It is difficult at this stage to confirm the findings of the quantitative data that has been collected as it is being processed. But through interviewing individuals who have been using English as a second language, the responses reveal that intelligibility is influenced by attitudinal more than phonological factors.”

Wafa Zogbor, who is from Abu-Dhabi in the UAE, hopes that her research will be replicated beyond the Arab societies to expand the scope to different contexts.

Source: University of Leicester ([news](#) : [web](#))

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