

Implications of ELF for ESP/EAP Teachers, Learners, and International Academic Conference Discourse

6

Abstract

In this chapter, we will discuss the relevance of the emergence of ELF in terms of its application to the ESP/EAP classroom, the psychological impact upon NNES for academic conference discourse, and the related issue of developing or mastering intelligible pronunciation. In this section, I will attempt to perform a bit of ‘pathology’—suggesting that much of the anxiety associated with CPs is self-inflicted and preventable. I will advocate a type of cognitive therapy as a possible treatment—meaning that the way we view English, who we think allegedly ‘owns’ it, and what we believe the intrinsic function or purpose of a CP is—can positively or negatively influence performance. I’ll suggest that certain popular preemptive remedies, such as focusing heavily upon fixing ‘accents’ to approximate a NES model and concentrating on attaining lexico-grammatical perfection in speech, far from being curative priorities, can actually serve as impediments to producing effective performance outcomes.

6.1 Pedagogical and Classroom Considerations for the ESP/EAP Instructor

Developing oral conference English presentation skills has become a staple of postgraduate programs worldwide. EAP programs for NNESs are now commonplace, as academics are expected not only to understand but also to actively partake in the institutional, disciplinary, linguistic, and cultural dimensions associated with academic research and practice (Hyland, 2006; Gillett, 1989). ESP courses prepare learners for the application of these skills within their relevant academic/professional fields, necessitating a productive comprehension of not only of the generic structure

of academic oral presentations but also of the tenor and lexico-grammatical components within specific professional fields.

Eriksson and Gustafsson (2008) refer to this as part of an ESP ‘intervention’ for their chemistry students in Sweden, with the manner in which speech text templates or models are to be applied becoming a major concern. They argue that the transferability of templates might actually be counterproductive and instead advocate creating more genre awareness among learners. Kaur and Ali (2018) note that most previous research has focused only on parts of oral presentations, often neglecting the rhetorical structure as a totality, particularly the multimodal features that bind speech, written text, visuals, and the moves made between these. While noting that the form of an academic presentation is linear, it is not rigid—as there appear to be a variety of optional moves available to the speaker. They also argue that more research on these multimodal features needs to be conducted in order to effectively apply the teaching of CP skills within their (Malaysian) context.

Tuomainen (2016) advocates a blended learning approach, utilizing both online and onsite resources, based on his experiences teaching Finnish business and economics students. Tuomainen notes that such a blended approach particularly helped learners overcome the difficulty of adopting a suitable tenor for delivering academic oral presentations. Cai (2016) notes that the application of teaching oral presentation (and other EAP) skills to law and politics students in China has marked a positive transition from exam-oriented general English. Fellner (2011) successfully utilized experiential language learning, involving cyclical practice and teacher modeling, as a foundation for developing the English presentation skills of his low proficiency in Japanese science and engineering students. Scaffolding in this way, he argues, can help to overcome a lack of core fluency.

Wilson and Brooks (2014) applied similarly scaffolded preparation activities in teaching poster session skills, such as developing learner confidence by starting with simple self-introduction forms and then gradually moving to narrower academic content that required linguistic micro-skills. They also used videos of previous performances, to aid their Japanese learners. In Hong Kong, Bankowski (2010) also utilized a scaffolding approach to teaching oral presentations, hers involving gradual stages of training, first in research skills, that followed by analytical skill training, before embarking on actual presentation skills. In this way, the cohesion between research questions, introductions, outlines, and conclusions can be more readily maintained.

Januin and Stephen (2015) suggest that oral presentation skills should be treated as a specific element of discourse competency as a whole, with emphasis applied in particular to the public-speaking skills, oral presentation structure, and linguistic knowledge. Velikaya (2017) notes the central role that prosodic features (pitch, intensity, and duration) played in determining presentation coherence and cohesion for her Russian economics and finance students.

All the aforementioned local studies address the specific application of teaching and practicing oral presentation skills to NNEs as a central feature of ESP/EAP courses. As we have seen, without some element of scaffolding in skill development and consideration given to the textual, generic, and prosodic qualities of academic

presentations it is likely that novice NNES academics will find presenting in English to be an overwhelmingly daunting task. One emerging area of interest that may mitigate these concerns, however, comprises our next section.

Exercise for Section 6.1

Rank the following in terms of what you consider priorities in developing academic oral presentation skills for NNES: (a) the effective use of prosody, (b) an understanding of the generic structure of a CP, (c) greater linguistic skill, (d) developing multimodal skills. Give reasons for your choices.

6.2 What is the Relevance of the Legitimization of ELF for Conferencing English?

The fact that ELF has become established as a legitimate variety of English should have a positive influence among many NNESs as there is often an unnecessary psychological submission or sense of linguistic inferiority held toward the native English speaker. The implicit ELF response to this concern would be that there are ways around this issue. Many NNESs I have encountered worry about their English being ‘imperfect.’ Many express concern about ‘making mistakes’ in English and not being able to express themselves as precisely as they’d like. But, as we have noted, NNESs now represent the majority of English speakers worldwide. Belittling or criticizing an NNES for falling short of an Anglo-American model looks more and more like a relic of the nineteenth century and is almost unheard of at international conferences. In short, *one doesn’t have to sound like a native-speaker to be an effective or competent English communicator, particularly in formalized international settings!*

Noting the acceptance of nonstandard forms should supply some relief to NNES academic English presenters, because the promulgation of many of these new standards may free them from the habit of concentrating too much on maintaining concordance with grammatical minutiae that often holds little communicative value. However, NNES presenters emboldened by this new acceptance of non-canonical forms must keep in mind the caveat that the new standards set by the normalization of ELF forms currently apply only to the mode of *speech*, not to written English! A failure to conform to the canonical forms of formal written English, such as RPs, may well adversely affect whether a paper is accepted for publication or not. Neither does recognition of the validity and applicability of ELF forms mean that all spoken forms and utterances made in academic forums are of equal communicative value. The acceptance of an ELF variety does not imply that concerns about unprepared and/or sloppy English are unfounded or unnecessary. To address this, both preferred and non-preferred ELF forms will be introduced throughout this book.

The point being made here is actually twofold. One is that during the CP, presenters can (perhaps better, *will*) make grammatical or lexical slips that often do not affect the semantic value or uptake of what they want to convey. These should be treated not as instances of emerging ELF forms but as simple errors in articulation. Given the real-time nature of speech, particularly when performed under the pressure of facing a live audience, even NSs of any language are prone to similar slips.

However, audience members will be unlikely to be confused if a speaker alludes to a PowerPoint slide and says, as noted in one of many similar cases of noun–verb non-agreement that I observed, ‘*The initial trial appear to be productive*’ (versus the ‘ideal’ form ‘*The initial trial appeared to be productive*’). In real-time speech, audience comprehension converges on what they expect the speaker to say, not on the minutiae of what the speaker actually said—that is unless the uptake is semantically or pragmatically ambiguous. ‘Errors’ of this sort may not even be consciously processed by the audience.

The second point being made here is that conference attendees can and will often utilize English forms that may not be canonical but neither are they necessarily products of lexical or grammatical deficiency. Many are likely to be manifestations of English being used as an ELF, deployed by the speaker as determined by the real-time nature of the environment, the makeup of the listener(s) or audience, the communicative purpose, and the speaker’s self-identity. Given these qualities, the English used is likely to feel less distant to the speaker—they are more likely to maintain a sense of ownership over the language they produce, as opposed to those approaching English as a type of distant ‘other.’

Questions and Exercises for Section 6.2

1. Why should academic conference NNES speakers and participants not be overly concerned with grammatical minutiae in speech?
2. Why do we often overlook surface errors in speech?
3. To what degree should NNESs be highly cognizant of surface features, such as syntax and lexis, in the spoken language? List three features in particular do you think represent priorities for mastering and three that can safely be dispensed with for speech.

6.3 Removing the Psychological Burden for NNESs

For ESP/EAP teachers or readers who plan to participate in, or train young academics for, academic conferences, the most interesting product of ELF research is likely the realization that these new standards have emerged in both specific non-native English-speaking interactions worldwide *and* are utilized within specific professional discourse communities. Therefore, rather than trying to mimic a North

American standard that will be almost impossible to attain for the average NNEs who has no immediate connection to that region, a more relevant, less intimidating, more internationally accepted standard can be adopted.

This should take some of the pressure off NNEs academics, knowing that they are not really at a linguistic disadvantage vis-à-vis ‘others’ and that the standard held by the majority of the world’s English speakers—that is, those who do not have English as an official language or were colonized by Anglophones—is a standard they can realistically aspire to.

In other words, the ‘native’ model of English is not only impossible and unreasonable for NNEs but also now *unnecessary*. After all, if over 95% of the NNEs presenters at these conferences I’ve attended are have successfully conveyed their research in English, perhaps we should be looking at these successful and competent non-native English speakers as our role models.

Psychologically, this should unload the NNEs presenter/participant of a heavy burden and thereby enhance motivation. Trying to imitate a native Californian might be an impossible goal for a hematologist from Armenia and, initially, might make giving up active involvement in international academic discourse a more attractive proposition—but developing one’s English conferencing skills to participate in the international specialist discourse community, to engage with educated Korean, Polish, or Brazilian peers, and not to prove one’s academic worth to Anglo-American adjudicators, now appears to be a very attainable and more essentially ‘global’ target.

However, some opposition has already been voiced against this position (see Jenkins [2006] for an outline some of these arguments). One of the most common is that using nonstandard forms is to practice ‘deficit linguistics.’ Accepting deviations from a NS norm—including code-switching and code-mixing—sets the communicative bar lower, weakens standards, and allows for linguistic sloppiness in which the median stage of interlanguage can become a learner’s end goal, resulting in stunted English growth. And certainly, if a Cambodian researcher, for example, is planning to spend a long time in an Anglophone country, it may make sense to use British or American English as a learner target or model. But for only occasional usage, in limited contexts such as international conferences, where the majority of other attendees are not native English speakers, maintaining the ‘inner-circle’ standard as a goal is simply not realistic.

What I am suggesting is that what both ESP/EAP teachers and learners should do is instead of thinking of ELF forms as somehow ‘lowering’ the standard, think of them rather as (1) a more legitimate standard—given the distribution of English speakers worldwide—and, in most cases, (2) a more appropriate target variety, for the same reason. Again, this will likely have liberating psychological consequences for many NNEs academics.

Let me illustrate this with an example. When I was surveying NNEs doctors at my own institution about their English presentation anxieties, one survey question asked to what degree they would feel anxious according to the geographical location of the speech. The results indicated that the further one was removed from their home environment of Japan and next Asia, the more performance anxiety

grew, even if it was the same presentation being performed using the same English (Guest, 2013).

I have noticed this manifested in daily practice at my Japanese university. We currently have ongoing exchange programs with Thai, Taiwanese, Chinese, and Indonesian university medical schools, through which faculty, clinicians, researchers, and students often come to visit and carry out research or practice at our university hospital. The difference in explicit anxiety and tension when our students and staff interact with the NNES visitors, versus those cases when Western visitors appear, is immediate and palpable. Our Japanese hosts and students are far less tongue-tied and more at ease with themselves when dealing with the NNES Asian visitors, even though it is still English that is used as the lingua franca. I suspect that this occurs because there seems to be an undercurrent of consciousness that our NNES Asian partners and the Japanese hosts are in the same boat linguistically, that there is an equal starting line for both, that there is no corrupting power status, and that both should—and likely will be—accepting of each other’s English ‘shortcomings.’

By no longer treating English as belonging to Anglo-American or inner-circle speakers but rather seeing it as a common tool used by people similar to one’s self—perhaps living in the same geographical region—interactions are more likely to become more relaxed, less imbued with debilitating tension. Consequently, as a result of being able to psychologically relax during English communication, and use the tools of language negotiation and repair, NNES speakers may actually come to improve their own English communicative skills as a by-product of engaging in these interactions.

Questions and Exercises for Section 6.3

1. Do you think the type of tension described by NNESs when addressing NESs is widely shared throughout the world? If so, what are the causes?
2. Can you explain the process by which NNESs might actually improve their English skills by interacting with fellow NNESs?

6.4 The Focus upon Spoken Discourse Syntactical Minutiae (Among NNESs)

One recurring problem I’ve noted among many NNES academics and professionals who self-profess to not having great confidence in their English ability is the belief that a small, technical English error renders the entire utterance unintelligible. I often get emails in English from Japanese friends, colleagues, and associates that invariably contain a few surface errors. These messages are often accompanied or followed by added notes asking some variation of the question ‘*Can you understand my English at all?*’ or apologizing for any and all errors.

Perhaps because of the emphasis that central or national university entrance examination preparation puts upon syntactical English minutiae in many NNES countries, it appears that many NNESs tend to *overestimate* the negative impact of an error. This, of course, makes the user more conscious of error avoidance in the first place and can ultimately hinder actual performance (just as high-profile athletes are likely to perform poorly when focusing too much upon ‘avoiding errors’).

As a rough approximation, over 90% of the NNES presentations I observed contained spoken passages which grammarians conforming to canonical standards might categorize as ‘errors,’ but in fewer than 5% of these cases could I say that was I perplexed about meaning or intention myself because of the error, nor did any notable communicative breakdown occur. Rather, the propensity of some to focus upon technical minutiae at the expense of actually conveying a meaningful message, or believing that the former is necessary to achieve the latter, can negatively affect CP performance.

Perhaps the most significant and striking immediate observation I made at the conferences I attended was that there was not always a direct correlation between the speakers’ apparent overall English proficiency and effective presentation performance or impact. While one might expect more competent English speakers to consistently have an advantage when presenting in that language, it was evident that many less technically ‘proficient’ English speakers who had developed excellent CP skills could often perform more effectively than their more viscerally ‘fluent’ peers. In short, proficiency in performance is not correlated to the degree of native-likeness, a quality that has been previously noted among NNES presenters by Morita (2000), one which should also hold considerable significance for motivating those NNESs who may lack confidence in their general English abilities.

Therefore, although almost all the speakers I observed would be classified as NNESs, this does not necessarily imply an automatic disadvantage in CP skill or performance vis-à-vis NES. In fact, NNES presenters may have to be even more cognizant of performance factors that NES might take for granted, as NNESs tend to actively use a greater range of interactional strategies, often to compensate for other English proficiency shortcomings (Morita, 2002).

Any NNES tendency to focus upon attaining perfect form and hence avoid errors can not only serve as a psychological and performative hindrance but also discourage one from taking a positive approach to new, and potentially challenging, situations—such as giving a CP in English. Yet, as I have noted, many very effective English CPs I observed were full of surface imperfections.

On the left side of Table 6.1 is a list of prototypical phrases I noted that were repeatedly made by effective and impactful NNES conference presenters, with the corresponding canonical or ‘standard’ forms written on the right. These lexicogrammatical patterns were systematic, recurring, and each was uttered by speakers of at least three different nationalities. Many of these forms might be indicative of an ELF, as they appear to indicate an underlying nonstandard varietal norm, but, more importantly for our purposes here, these NNES phrases were completely comprehensible and did not interfere with the communicated message in any way.

Table 6.1 Nonstandard NNES conference presentation utterances (adapted from 国際学会のためのサバイバル英語術, Guest, 2014)

Actual CP utterances	'Ideal' form of utterance
We placed clamp on X	We placed the clamp on the x
In the case with...	In the case of...
Three colonoscopy were performed during two separate period	Three colonoscopies were performed during two separate periods
Left side approach we will find X	Using a left side approach we will find X
We must take care of X	We must be aware of X
How to X?	How can/should we do X?
First, I present X	First, I will present X
We want to ask why is this so	We want to ask why this is so.
How should we do?	How should we do it?
We discussed to operate this case or not	We discussed whether or not to operate...
Even we had prepared thoroughly...	Even though we had prepared thoroughly
I'm going to deal with like this	I'm going to deal with it like this
We can well observe X	We can easily/clearly observe X
There was so significant difference	There was a very significant difference
Why we chose X is because	The reason we chose X is because
Because of no symptom	Because there was no symptom
May have some advantage to do by endoscope	There may be some advantage doing it...
It is not clear about the background of x	The background of X is not clear
In this technique	Using this technique

We can observe several common patterns emerging across examples here. The future 'will' is often omitted (#7, 10). The cleft or existential usages of 'There is' or 'The reason is' are ignored or used haphazardly (#16, 17, 18). Sentence heads were often chosen more for immediate emphasis than for simply obeying grammatical rules (#4, 19, 20). Embedded question rules are not strictly observed (#6, 8). Grammatical objects (especially 'it') are dropped (#9, 13). Prepositions are chosen for semantic suitability regardless as to whether they are canonically correct or not (#3). Modals, modifiers, and intensifiers (and related lexical) choices were occasionally overgeneralized (#5, 14, 15), and modifiers such as 'whether' (#11) and 'though' in 'even though' (#12) are dropped when the meaning is otherwise clear. Despite these formal variations, all of the speakers quoted from above came appeared to be highly proficient in English.

However, the fact that so-called imperfect speech forms are common to conference presenters (and not just NNESSs) in no way exonerates the NNES who pays little or no attention to grammatically delicate areas, such as articles in the written or visual slide text. I noted one CP, for example, in which the nuanced usage of English articles and plurality was ignored, resulting in the written text, '*We used outpatient to test effectiveness.*' In such a case, the reader/listener has no idea if the

speaker means one or many outpatients or whether this patient is the same patient as any others mentioned earlier in the report—both of which are essential to creating or maintaining semantic cohesion.

While I do suggest that inexperienced NNES presenters have an academic peer (not necessarily an NES) check minutiae such as articles and plurals for their written texts, I would also encourage NNESs not to worry unduly about such details in the spoken mode of the CP, especially since varied intonation, supporting visuals, metadiscursive signaling, and even the dynamic speech time opportunity for repair, can serve to make any possible ambiguities clear.

I should also mention to young and novice researchers how crucial performing a visual spell-check of your slides is—and not merely running PowerPoint's built-in spell-check function. Rather, the type of checking I advocate entails going over every word on your slides and, if you have doubts about your English proficiency, doing so with a proficient English speaker, preferably someone familiar with the academic field.

Why? Because while miswriting 'staff' as 'stuff' (to note a fairly common example) might seem insignificant or even invisible to some NNESs (as well as being an item that goes undetected by PowerPoint's spell-check function), it will certainly stand out very much to viewers, who will be far more forgiving of speech errors than written text errors. The semantic difference between '*Thanks to our staff*' and '*Thanks to our stuff*' is, of course, quite significant, the textual equivalent of Romeo prosing to Juliet with a bit of lettuce prominently lodged between his teeth. While listeners may not even process minor speech transgressions, errors like these will divert the audience's attention away from what you actually want to convey.

Questions and Exercises for Section 6.4

1. Why is there a greater need for structural precision and accuracy in written over spoken CP texts?
2. At what point does the omission of articles, plurals, and grammatical features, such as verb tense agreement, become a significant factor in affecting comprehension for the listener?
3. Which of the speech examples given in this section do you think would most likely cause misunderstanding among listeners? Explain why you think so.

6.5 The Issue of NNES Conference Presentation Accents and Pronunciation

NNESs are generally very well aware that they speak English with 'an accent,' one that is often (but not always) distinct from those hailing from 'inner-circle' countries (of course, NESs have various 'accents'—one cannot, by definition, *not* have

an accent). This probably comes to the reader as no surprise. It is perfectly understandable that Thais speak English with a Thai accent, Nigerians with Nigerian, Swedes with Swedish.

Those who frequently attend international conferences will be very aware of the fact that accented English from all over the world is standard fare—and that this for many is a natural thing, as not only does it imbue an international conference with a global flavor but also serves as a snapshot of the linguistic realities underlying the academic interactions beyond one's own shores. While international conferences tend to use English as their lingua franca, the underlying demographic is polyglot.

The belief, however, occasionally enacted by a few overzealous English teachers that NNES accents and their manifestations in general English pronunciation represent a communicative infelicity and therefore must somehow be 'fixed' or 'corrected' should be viewed with some suspicion.

How so? First, it ignores the reality that English has no single, standardized 'correct' accent model. Treating such localized markings as 'wrong,' as deficit linguistics, may be considered a violation of the dignity of the NNES, particularly if these in no way impede communication.

Wallwork (2016) describes French designer Philippe Starck's TED presentation, in which the heavily accented and occasionally grammatically challenged Starck was greeted with an overwhelmingly positive response by the audience due to his engaging content. Moreover—and this is integral to those who are worried about their English accent—Wallwork notes that he spoke slowly. There is a tendency for speakers who have what they perceive as accent issues to speak quickly in order to hide or disguise alleged deficiencies, but often, in doing so, the resulting effect upon audience comprehension can be just the opposite of the intention.

This leads us to a key point: The degree of 'thickness' of an accent and the degree of intelligibility are not directly correlated, and as we have noted, with CPs, intelligibility is the goal. Recognizing this also forces us to separate the treatment of accents (which simply arises out of being a localized speaker of a given language) from those of pronunciation, which is manifested more at the morphemic or word levels (including stress). In the case of the latter, Jenkins (2000) has produced a Lingua Franca Core which covers those English pronunciation items considered indispensable for creating mutual intelligibility, not only between NNEs and NESs but also among NNEs.

In many cases, regional English accents actually *do* represent the conference norm in which case it will be the 'inner-circle' Anglophones whose accent may be considered to be on the periphery. Shared regional features of NNEs pronunciation have been noted by Kirkpatrick (2010) among speakers from Southeast Asia. Therefore, at a conference hosted in that part of the world, this 'nonstandard' form of English pronunciation would likely be used by a majority of participants, in effect making it the standard.

We must differentiate, however, between having an identifiable accent and the habit of forcing English wholesale into the phonetic categories of one's mother tongue, which becomes an issue of pronunciation. Let me give, as an example, English as it is used in my adopted home of Japan. In Japan, foreign loanwords (of

which there are many) are rendered in a phonetic script known as ‘katakana,’ which alters the pronunciation of those foreign loanwords to suit the Japanese phonetic system, making many of them unrecognizable to non-Japanese speakers.

However, this ‘katakana English’ is often wrongly conflated by both language teachers and learners in Japan with having an identifiable ‘Japanese accent.’ While almost all Japanese presenters I observed at international conferences maintained a recognizable ‘Japanese accent,’ only on very, very few occasions in my conference observations did I actually sense that the Japanese speaker was falling into the realm of ‘katakana’ phonetics.

Yes, there are indeed NNESs who force English into the phonetic constraints of their mother tongues, rendering it undecodable to anyone unfamiliar with the shared L1, but these represent extreme cases, not the norm. Each region of the world has its own examples of local English speakers who, for various reasons, cannot or do not attempt to approximate the phonetic systems of the foreign languages they are trying to speak (often due to lack of exposure to the target language). I would argue that this forcing of L1 phonetic systems into a second language represents the threshold at which pronunciation has become an issue that needs to be coached. However, this is a phenomenon quite distinct from merely having ‘an accent.’ The habit of using the phonetic forms of another language to produce English *will* require the speaker to make a distinct effort to alter or modify pronunciation or demand explicit training from a teacher if the speaker wishes to participate fruitfully at international conferences. But simply having a regionally or nationally distinctive accent does not.

Pronunciation training or analysis for individual lexical items or patterns can occur on a case-by-case basis. As examples, many otherwise English-proficient Japanese pronounce the noun ‘analysis’ by placing the stress on the penultimate syllable and thereby render it in a manner similar to the verb. Likewise, the ‘vi’ combination as in ‘virus’ and ‘vitamin’ in Japan tends to be rendered in a manner closer to German (reflecting the heritage of the former lingua franca of Japanese medicine). Younger students may tend to pronounce such terms this way until otherwise exposed to a more standardized English form, but most professionals will have grasped the difference well before reaching the level of conference presenter or attendee. Individual items like these can and should be addressed in training or classrooms, as opposed to thorough pronunciation practice aiming at ESL learners to sound more ‘native.’

The bottom line is that NNESs should not feel ashamed of their accents or assume that they will not be understood because of regional/national inflections in advance. Among the world community of English accents, most models are quite adequate for the purposes of interaction in the specific discourse community and are in fact indicators of the vibrancy of English being used as a lingua franca. As we have noted, at international conferences this degree of variety is expected and most attendees will adjust their listening antennae accordingly. International academic conferences are exemplary realizations of accommodation theory, part of which holds that interlocutors with different accents have a mutual responsibility to prepare for and accommodate the speech patterns of others (Cogo & Dewey, 2012).

Making adjustments to achieve convergence in communication is a central feature of negotiating meaning and, I repeat, is incumbent upon all parties involved.

As a result, I've long held the belief that any English pronunciation teaching or learning priority for NNEs should be based more on developing NNEs listening, or receptive skills, as opposed to speaking (productive skills). Even then, this is often more a matter of noting stress and de-stress patterns, as well as decoding more extended prosodic features—categories that move us closer to the more pertinent CP fields of intonation and linguacultural factors as opposed to morpheme pronunciation per se.

A final consideration to keep in mind for those NNEs academics researching, practicing in, or traveling to English inner-circle countries, is that most of these countries have histories of immigration from around the globe, and thus many locals will be used to dealing with those who have nonstandard accents or utilize nonstandard English forms. Only the most provincial or isolated among them would be likely to find 'foreign'-accented English particularly odd or troublesome. To be frank, many would say that that's their problem, not the NNEs's and, perhaps more to the point, these would not be the type of people who would typically populate academic or professional conferences.

Questions and Exercises for Section 6.5

1. What is the difference between an accent, pronunciation, and intonation? Which do you think is most pertinent for successful conference interactions? Why?
2. Can you suggest a threshold point at which the accent and/or pronunciation of a speaker might require coaching or a special effort in order to be understood?

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