ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN WORLD ENGLISHES

English Pronunciation Models in a Globalized World

Accent, acceptability and Hong Kong English

Andrew Sewell

SINGAPORE ASSOCIATION FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

ROUTLEDGE

English Pronunciation Models in a Globalized World

This book explores the topics of accent and pronunciation in global English. It highlights their connections with several important issues in the study of English in the world, including intelligibility, identity, and globalization. The unifying strand is provided by English pronunciation models: what do these models consist of, and why? The focus on pronunciation teaching is combined with sociolinguistic perspectives on global English, and the wider question asked by the book is: what does it mean to teach English pronunciation in a globalized world? The book takes Hong Kong – 'Asia's World City' – as a case study of how global and local influences interact, and how decisions about teaching need to reflect this interaction. It critically examines existing approaches to global English, such as World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca, and considers their contributions as well as their limitations in the Hong Kong context. A data-based approach with quantitative and qualitative data anchors the discussion and assists in the development of criteria for the contents of pronunciation models. *English Pronunciation Models in a Globalized World: Accent, acceptability and Hong Kong English* discusses, among other issues:

- global English: a socio-linguistic toolkit
- accents and communication: intelligibility in global English
- teaching English pronunciation: the models debate
- somewhere between: accent and pronunciation in Hong Kong.

Researchers and practitioners of English studies and applied linguistics will find this book an insightful resource.

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This Singapore Association for Applied Linguistics book series will provide a starting point for those who wish to know more about the aspects of the spread of English in the current globalized world. Each volume can cover the following aspects of the study of World Englishes: issues and theoretical paradigms, features-based studies (i.e. phonetics and phonology, syntax, lexis) and language in use (e.g. education, media, the law and other related disciplines).

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1 Introduction

Soundings in global English

'Hong Kong' evokes images: skyscrapers around the harbour, buildings ranged between verdant hills. Colourful neon signs in traditional Chinese characters, global brand names in Roman script. Street signs in Chinese and English, with Chinese increasing as you move from centre to periphery, from Central to the outlying districts. Hong Kong's branding as 'Asia's world city' appears to be justified. In Central, the international employees of international organizations share mall space with shoppers from mainland China. If the wind blows in the right direction you might see a container ship entering or leaving the Kwai Chung terminal on the Kowloon side. There is plenty of visual evidence of globalization, of 'flows of goods, capital, people and information' (Held *et al.* 1999).

Switching from image to sound: listening to the voices and languages, beyond the confines of Central, one might first notice the predominance of Cantonese in this city of seven million, worldly as it is. In the windowless classroom of an after-hours English school, a primary school student stands up:

> Standing at the front of the classroom in Hong Kong, nine-year-old Charlotte Yan recites a 2008 speech by Hillary Clinton – enunciating the words with a perfect American accent. 'Make sure we have a president who puts our country back on the path to peace, prosperity, and progress,' says Yan, her brow furrowed as she concentrates intensely on her pronunciation.
>
> (*South China Morning Post* 2013)

In itself this is not a particularly unusual scene, and similar ones are probably taking place in English classes in Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing and other Asian metropolises. The story introduces and illustrates the theme of interconnectedness that runs through this book: 'local' individuals and 'local' classrooms are influenced by global processes and flows. Students are exposed to many kinds of English, in mediated forms and in their diverse communities. Identities reflect the influences of the local and the global, of real and imagined communities. The 'outside' enters the classroom, and makes the very nature of the 'local', and the 'individual', more complex. Accent and pronunciation are among the most noticeable linguistic phenomena that reveal the interplay of the local and the global, and of the individual and the social.

In this introductory chapter I use the metaphor of 'soundings' to evoke the ways in which issues related to accent and pronunciation can be used to gauge the contours of other phenomena. For example, although the commodification of accents is one of the predictable outcomes of globalization, the 'accent school' story reveals how it is not simply a matter of ready-made 'accents' flowing around the globe. Perception is everything, and both the 'local' and the 'global' are transformed by their encounter with each other. After reading this story I watched the accompanying video and listened to the different English accents it contained. The story focuses on the question of whether 'British' accents are becoming less popular than 'American' ones in Hong Kong, but neither of these accents could be heard very often. The local interviewees had different kinds of Cantonese-inflected 'Hong Kong English' accents, at least from my analytical perspective. One of the interviewees maintained that 'we can understand both, but for what we speak we will speak the British accent' – again with what was for me an immediately recognizable Hong Kong accent. The difference in perception raises questions such as: what counts as a 'British' or 'American' accent, for different audiences? The story suggests that the accent label 'British' may have been locally appropriated. It seems to involve relative distinction, and what counts as 'British' for local speakers may not count as 'British' for others.

The fluid, contested nature of accent and pronunciation soon becomes apparent, and is thrown into sharper relief by the effects of global flows. Accent is one of the most noticeable semiotic displays available to human beings, and pronunciation is 'perhaps the linguistic feature most open to judgment' (Canagarajah 2005: 365). It might be expected that as digitally mediated communication becomes more common, the scope for 'face to face' interaction is correspondingly reduced. Logically, accent should then become less important. But one of the many paradoxes of globalization is that increasing mobility, and decreasing predictability, may actually create more scope for judgements of identity to be based on accent. Kroskrity (2000: 112) observes that in 'circumstances where little is known about the other's biographical identity, interactants must provide in the here-and-now the communicative symbols by which they will be assessed as persons'. Texts may have voices, but people speak, advertising their selfhood with every sound, syllable and word.

The noticeability of accent, its social resonance, explains why accent-related stories appear so frequently in media discourse relating to language. As an introduction to the topic, it is both instructive and interesting to consult examples of this discourse. Among other things, we soon realize that despite changes in the 'outer' world, the way we deal with accent in our 'inner' worlds has not changed very much. We learn that stories about 'accent' are also stories about other things. In May 2014, a Cantonese-speaking politician in Hong Kong's Legislative Council (or LegCo) chamber switched to English in order to criticize the conduct of a transport authority executive. What caught the attention of commentators was not what he said, but the way that he said it: his Cantonese English accent and non-standard grammar were held up as examples of 'the decline of English standards' (Lo 2014). The speaker's pronunciation of the word

'shame', thought to sound like 'shave' by the same commentator, was given as an example of such 'abuse', along with accent-related infractions committed by other politicians. Unusually, the politician responded to criticism by saying that 'everyone speaks with an accent' (Lo 2014), thus aligning himself squarely with the descriptive orthodoxy of sociolinguistics: all varieties of English are equal (Doerr 2009: 195).

The incident was far from being merely a matter of pronunciation, of the difference between consonants. It has to be seen as a question of identity: in its individual and collective dimensions, and in the way in which it is achieved by oneself or ascribed by others (Blommaert 2005: 205–6). The relationship between accent and identity is one of the major themes of this book, which seeks to uncover the social significance of accent and relate this to pedagogical concerns. In doing so it recognizes the centrality of identity in language use in general (Joseph 2004), as well as its importance in language learning (Norton 2000).

In addition, the 'LegCo story' has to be seen as a clash of language ideologies, involving questions of the legitimacy of particular forms of English. The social significance of accent cannot be understood without considering these ideologies, which place linguistic behaviour 'firmly within an animating cultural context' (Seargeant 2009: 22). Voloshinov famously observed that the pronunciation of a single word represents the dynamic interplay of historical and social currents, and therefore becomes 'a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently-oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of an individual is a product of the living interaction of social forces' (Voloshinov 1973: 41).

Clark and Holquist (1984: 220) note how in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, the young Russian radicals pronounce the word for 'principles' as *printsip*, as opposed to the 'soft French way' (*principe*) preferred by the older conservatives. This difference between consonants, between possible ways of pronouncing a word, brought into the open 'the major political and intellectual conflicts of the 1860s in Russia'. In Hong Kong, accent-related incidents and stories such as those above reveal conflicts and tensions along generational, social, and possibly political lines; in the current political climate it is not far-fetched to believe that an accent perceived as too 'foreign' might not be a desirable attribute for a pro-establishment politician.

To focus on accent and pronunciation is thus to explore the complex and conflicted nature of language use, from both speakers' and listeners' perspectives. But these conflicts do not only occur *between* groups and individuals; the tensions and contradictions of globalization are increasingly manifested *within* individuals. The study of Baratta (2014) suggests that many British people have felt the need to shed their regional accents as they pursue social and geographic mobility. This often occurs in response to overt or covert accent discrimination (called 'accentism' by Baratta). Conflict at the 'outer' level is reflected in conflict at the 'inner' level, and far from being a natural, chameleon-like adaptation, changing one's accent is seen to inflict psychological damage. Commenting on this study, a British newspaper columnist described his experience of accent change in an article entitled 'I want my accent back':

> I do hugely regret having lost my [Welsh] accent and joined the superficially posh set. I would love to sound like Richard Burton and bore people to death by drunkenly reciting my awful, verbose poetry in pubs. Leaving Wales for England, swapping animated working class for anaemic middle class, losing the accent – it all added up to deracination. Perfect for journalism, but damaging for life.
>
> (Moss 2014)

The article's title suggests nostalgia and longing not only for an authentic accent, but also for an authentic personality and way of being in the world. The widespread media discussion of Baratta's study was characterized by appeals to a 'real', 'original' or 'natural' accent, with change and hybridity implicitly portrayed as unnatural, undesirable and as something that can 'undermine your sense of being' (Baratta, cited in Moss 2014). Moss's self-perceived accent hybridity is a cause for regret, and he feels himself to be 'not quite English'. This is despite the fact that some of the personalities mentioned – the actor Richard Burton, in this case – seem to exemplify change and hybridity in terms of their biographies.

The nature of 'hybridity' is problematic in these discussions, as it raises the dubious possibility of 'purity'; nevertheless, such concerns are a staple of metalinguistic discourse pertaining to language and accent. As well as further illustrating the contested status of accent phenomena, and their importance for self-identity, this story illustrates another important fact about 'accent' in such discourse. It quickly takes on an associative and metaphorical role, so that wider (and deeper) issues of identity, class identification and social mobility are represented at the linguistic level by 'changing accent'.

To a large extent this is true of all metalinguistic discussion; Deborah Cameron's (1995) concept of verbal hygiene expresses the way in which the linguistic order often becomes a metaphor for a real or imagined social order. But once again, the noticeability of accent makes it a frequent trigger and conduit for such discussion. Another speaker who shows accent hybridity in a situational sense is Barack Obama, whose ability to switch from the accent and language of a 'soaring, formal inaugural address' to that of 'a black man comfortable in black Chicago' has been widely noted (*The Economist* 2013). This flexibility has earned him popularity as well as charges of using a 'false' or 'fake' accent. Hybridity and change may be seen as desirable or necessary by some, but as regrettable or even repugnant by others. The pronunciation of a word may pass unnoticed, or it may be perceived as a symptom of falling standards and wider social malaise. Concerns about language and accent change map onto concerns about hybridity, change and difference in everyday life. To a large extent these phenomena have always existed, but the accelerated changes and movements wrought by globalization have their own correlates in accent and in discussions about accent.

Accent-related stories became more ominous as the preparation of this book progressed, further illustrating the global forces underlying 'local' discussions of accent and pronunciation. In the Middle East, the mediatised killings of Americans by a British citizen – dubbed 'Jihadi John' by some newspapers – served as a

focus for worldwide attention, leading to political responses and eventual military action. Accent played a prominent role in the unfolding events. It was highly significant that Jihadi John spoke with a British accent, variously described as 'east London', 'south London' or 'multicultural', and media discussion again illustrates how the themes noted above – identity, local/global interconnectedness, contested perceptions and the potential for metaphorical transfer or 'verbal hygiene' – relate to accent. For example, some media sources used the term 'multicultural' to describe Jihadi John's accent. In descriptive sociolinguistic terms, the label suggests the kind of hybrid or 'crossing' accents identified in London by Rampton (2005). But in media discourse, it may also have represented a desire to problematize 'multicultural', transnational or religious identity, *vis-à-vis* traditional, 'boundaried' views of national identity.

The concepts of linguists, and the approaches of language educators, have also been affected by the upheavals of globalization. Amid the general interrogation of borders and boundaries, there has been a widespread questioning of 'bounded' concepts, such as bounded languages (Makoni and Pennycook 2007) and their association with bounded territories or communities (e.g. Canagarajah 2013). Combined with a poststructuralist view of 'identity' that emphasizes fluidity (e.g. Maher 2005; Norton 2014), traditional concepts such as 'code-switching' and 'code-mixing' are also brought into question by these recalibrations. In discussing Barack Obama's accent modifications and arguing for an expanded view of the term, Demby (2013) observes that:

> [w]e're looking at code-switching a little more broadly: many of us subtly, reflexively change the way we express ourselves all the time. We're hop-scotching between different cultural and linguistic spaces and different parts of our own identities – sometimes within a single interaction.

In pronunciation teaching, one of the most notable effects of globalization has been a vigorous debate about the most appropriate 'models': native speaker, 'local' or transnational 'lingua franca'. The debate has not always fully questioned the viability of these labels, however. Their nature and relevance in the age of globalization is one of the main practical concerns of this book.

Focus and aims

Many more examples could be given to illustrate the areas of interest outlined above: the importance of accent and pronunciation in language use and language learning; the interrelationships between accent and identity; the existence of contested perceptions regarding 'accent', and their ideological correlates; and over and above all this, the interconnectedness of these issues at local and global levels. These are wide-ranging topics, and the immediate requirement is for delimitation. There are two focusing devices in this book, one practical and the other geographical. The practical focus is on pronunciation teaching, and the book asks: what does it mean to teach English pronunciation in a globalized world? What

are the possibilities, when there is such enormous variation and so little consensus as to the nature of 'English'? One of the central arguments of this book is that so-called 'local' pronunciation teaching cannot take place without considering its translocal, global dimensions. These include the ways in which English is used in communication, the ways it is represented in mediated discourse, and the ways it relates to the issues of identity and belonging highlighted in the accent-related stories above. These dimensions are complex, but they cannot be ignored. As Derwing (2008: 348) argues, the 'milieu' in which students find themselves is 'critical in designing a curriculum that adequately addresses pronunciation needs'. The wider, sociolinguistic question then becomes: what is the nature of this milieu when, as Giddens (1991: 32) observes, 'self' and 'society' are linked in a milieu that is global, and for the first time in human history?

Partly to explore this milieu, the geographical focus of this book is on Hong Kong. Many sociolinguistic accounts of accent phenomena (e.g. Lippi-Green 1997) have concentrated on so-called 'native speaker' settings, but the focus here is on English as a language that shares a complex 'language ecology' (Mühlhäusler 1996) with other languages. Hong Kong makes for a particularly interesting case study, for a number of reasons. It is often positioned as being 'at the forefront of globalization' (Ho *et al.* 2005: 4). It challenges oversimplified notions of 'local' and 'global', whether in terms of linguistic description, sociolinguistic explanation or pedagogical modelling. The Hong Kong poet Louise Ho has observed that Hong Kong's 'site' – its socialized space – far exceeds its geographical boundaries; it 'hovers above the place and is part of the globalized configuration' (Ho 2000: 382).

Adopting the twin foci of 'pronunciation teaching' and 'Hong Kong' in order to frame the discussion, the book has three main aims. The first is practical; Park and Wee (2012: 167) observe that 'many theoretical perspectives on global English that we have reviewed … are often vague about what kind of practical applications they can offer'. This book has a strong pedagogical orientation, and aims to provide at least some guidelines for pronunciation teaching. Hong Kong is used as a case study, but the wider applicability of these guidelines is also considered. The task of providing guidelines is not taken lightly, and the overall approach can only be exploratory, rather than prescriptive. The aim is not necessarily to promote pronunciation teaching, although it is hoped that local teachers of English will benefit from the demystification, and perhaps the demythification, that is attempted here.

The second aim is more theoretical. One cannot focus on 'accent' in ways that exclude wider issues of 'language', and the book aims to contribute to the theoretical framework that informs studies of global English. It does this by integrating insights from both linguistics and sociolinguistics, exploring and elaborating important concepts. Another of the book's central arguments is that combining insights in this way is not merely desirable, but necessary in order to understand what is going on and to relate proposals to current practices. The approach to intelligibility, which is examined in its interactional and pedagogical dimensions, is one example; it involves considering the relationship between

the 'systematic' and 'emergent' aspects of language, its predictable and less predictable aspects. This is a current area of research interest, stimulated by discussion of 'lingua franca' communication in English. Sussex and Kirkpatrick (2012: 224–5) refer to the continuum between 'SEE' (system-entity-edifice) and 'LFE' (Lingua Franca English), and note that the 'extent and way in which the system and emergent frameworks can co-exist and collaborate represent a major challenge for research'. This book aims to make a modest contribution to the exploration of this coexistence.

The third aim of the book is polemical. In addition to studying linguistic and sociolinguistic phenomena in their own right, the book uses them to create a vantage point for metastudy, by examining the ways in which linguists approach certain aspects of global English. The book therefore engages with some of the debates surrounding global English, in which there is a tendency for accents to become vehicles for other concerns. Descriptions of accents can become contentious, as the meanings of 'local' and 'global', 'better' and 'worse', are played out on the terrain of vowels and consonants. Relating these debates back to its pedagogical aims, the book evaluates the proposals for pronunciation teaching that have emerged from the research paradigms of World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca. It argues that they are hindered by a somewhat traditional approach to language 'varieties', and the communities, or constituencies of users, that they are claimed to represent. Criticism of these paradigms has been a staple of recent global English studies (e.g. Park and Wee 2012; Canagarajah 2013), and I wish to avoid repetition by focusing on issues of accent and pronunciation; moreover, the intention here is not further critique of these paradigms, but the integration of some of their insights into a new synthesis.

The local/global polarity does not only relate to space. Globalization processes mean that time, in the form of 'change', is an underlying theme of books such as this one. Debates about global English are often debates about the extent and desirability of change. The current era is characterized by rapid change of many kinds, and there have been demonstrable changes in the way English is used in the world; yet language teaching has been slow to adjust, in many respects. Dialogue between language teaching, linguistics and sociolinguistics, with input from relevant fields, is needed to understand the nature of change at different levels and across different time frames. This book aims to contribute to such a dialogue, and its aims and foci can be seen in this light. It is concerned with changes in the way English is used, in the ways it is taught and tested, and in the ways it is conceptualized.

Structure of the book

In summary, the book frames the twin foci of pronunciation teaching and Hong Kong within a broader study of global English and accent, one that has both linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions. It starts by outlining the general, theoretical foundations that underpin the study of globalization phenomena, and the ways these have affected the study of language. It then moves on to

examine the nature of accent, from different perspectives, and of pronunciation teaching. The sociolinguistic contours of global English in Hong Kong are then sketched; various kinds of accent-related data from Hong Kong are used to examine important questions and issues, and to inform the creation of pedagogical guidelines. The discussion is then turned outwards again, as the book considers what it means to teach pronunciation in a globalized world, and what this in turn can tell us about global English.

In Chapter 2, I take a broad sociolinguistic perspective on global English, first of all by placing it in the context of general processes and phenomena of globalization. Key research orientations are identified, ones that inform the approach taken in the rest of the book. These include the notion of *practices*, in its several guises: in social theory, in sociolinguistic approaches to global English, and in emerging research paradigms such as World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca. The chapter then outlines the contents of a sociolinguistic toolkit for the study of global English, drawing mainly on Blommaert's (2010) sociolinguistics of globalization: scales, indexicality, language ideology are among its contents, chosen for their utility in understanding accent and pronunciation from local and global perspectives.

Chapter 3 introduces key issues related to accent and pronunciation, while still retaining a 'global' orientation towards international communication. It first attempts to disambiguate the terms 'accent' and 'pronunciation'. Accent-related phenomena are explored from various angles, beginning with a consideration of their evolutionary and psychological significance. The relationship between accent and identity is examined in some detail. To understand the ways in which accent features are learned, this chapter draws on insights from both sociolinguistics and studies of second language acquisition. Chapter 4 is more concerned with the time frame of interaction; it takes a detailed and critical look at the concept of intelligibility, as this has played an important role in discussions of global English and pronunciation teaching. Research findings relating to international communication in English are summarized and discussed in relation to concepts such as functional load. While acknowledging the emergent, unpredictable qualities of language use, this chapter argues for the continuing relevance of its 'systematic' aspects, even in spoken communication.

Chapter 5 takes a pedagogical perspective by investigating the nature of pronunciation teaching and pronunciation models. In order to characterize current approaches it begins with a brief historical overview of pronunciation teaching. The characteristics of pronunciation 'models', and their role in current debates, is considered in the light of proposals from both the World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca research positions. As an additional part of its theoretical contribution, and as way to navigate through the models debate, the chapter concludes by outlining a conceptual model of accent variation. The model also serves as an evaluation framework in subsequent chapters, in order to identify priorities for teaching. It brings together some of the linguistic and sociolinguistic strands of the book, and its application is designed to encourage balanced attention to these areas. It portrays the effects of factors that are usually

classed as 'linguistic', such as first-language influences and intelligibility, along with 'sociolinguistic' factors such as identity and acceptability.

Chapter 6 outlines key aspects of Hong Kong's sociolinguistic context as a prelude to the accent-related data and the pedagogical recommendations that follow. Questions of language ideology also come to the fore in this chapter. The main focus is on the idea of 'standard language', as an enhanced understanding of this is important for understanding language orientations and attitudes. The perception of English accents in Hong Kong as being 'better' or 'worse' is approached via the concept of 'accent-based hegemony' (Luk and Lin 2006). The status of 'Hong Kong English' in scholarly and popular discourse is also examined, again by identifying competing ideologies of language. The chapter provides an overview of previous studies of 'the Hong Kong English accent', taking a meta-theoretical orientation that critically examines such descriptive activities. The consideration of 'ideological' factors at this stage of the book is not merely for their theoretical relevance; it is argued that proposals for language teaching must take account of such factors if they are to have any chance of success.

Using the evaluation model presented earlier as an organizational guide, Chapter 7 presents data relating to various aspects of Hong Kong English accents. These range from the patterned variation that exists in terms of accent features, to the intelligibility and acceptability of these features for Hong Kong listeners. While earlier 'accent attitude' studies in the World Englishes tradition have tended to indicate the inferior status of a posited 'local variety', I will take a features-based approach in order to argue that this very much depends on what is meant by a local variety. This further problematizes the concept and adds another strand to the local/global theme that traverses the book. To round off the chapter, interview data illustrate the ways in which students in Hong Kong orient themselves towards the various accent-related phenomena and concepts discussed earlier. This provides further insights into the nature of 'Hong Kong English', intelligibility and the difference between accent and pronunciation.

Finally, Chapter 8 draws together some of the major strands and arguments of the book, outlining its pedagogical indications both locally and more globally, and addressing the central question of what it means to teach English pronunciation in the era of global English.

Approach and terminology

The book's integrative orientation means that certain topics are summarized rather than covered in detail. Elsewhere, there are book-length treatments of accent (e.g. Moyer 2013), of approaches to pronunciation teaching in international contexts (e.g. Low 2014; Walker 2010), and studies of the phonological features of the Hong Kong English accent (e.g. Setter *et al.* 2010). There are also more detailed investigations of global English in particular local contexts, focusing on language ideologies (e.g. Park 2009 in the case of South Korea, and Seargeant 2009 in Japan). The aim here is rather different: it is to combine insights from different fields, to reinforce the book's overall relevance and to generate new perspectives on

accent-related aspects of language and communication. The book aims to provide a more rounded picture of English from both local and global perspectives, and to use this as a basis for the formulation of pedagogical guidelines.

I have avoided an overly technical approach to accents and their features, so that the book remains accessible to its intended readers. It identifies general principles as far as possible, rather than giving detailed accounts of particular sounds or processes. When technical terms are required, they are explained in the text. The use of phonetic symbols is of course unavoidable, but I have endeavoured to minimize their use and to describe or explain the sounds and processes involved. I follow the convention of using slash brackets / / to represent phonemes, 'abstract' sound categories, and square brackets [ ] to denote 'concrete' realizations or actual pronunciations of these categories. Thus in general terms we can describe the consonant at the end of the word *feel* as being /l/, an 'alveolar lateral' in the terminology of the IPA. If we wish to go into more detail and focus on particular accents, or on individual realizations of this sound, it may be necessary to use square brackets and distinguish between so-called 'dark l', or [ɫ], and 'clear l', or [l]. A word like *field* has a 'dark l' in many accents, but a 'clear l' in Welsh and some Irish English accents, for example. Such details are interesting and often important – the devil is definitely in the detail when accent variation is concerned – but as far as possible I try to spare the reader from unnecessary detail.

The innocent-looking phoneme/allophone distinction may in fact be controversial, for different reasons (see Carr 2012 for discussion). Other facets of 'terminology' are more obviously controversial, and not all of them can be skirted around. As with any new field of study, global English debates often revolve around terminology. Categories and concepts of all kinds have been brought to crisis by changing sociolinguistic landscapes, and by the new disciplinary and interdisciplinary windows that have opened up to view them. In Chapter 2 I will survey some of these perspectives, but an initial problem for a study of this kind is presented by the available terminology; a few key terms will be introduced and briefly discussed here.

The native/non-native speaker dualism presents a familiar problem. It is by now a commonplace to assert that there is little or no ontological justification for the distinction (e.g. Leung *et al.* 1997). These categories do, however, have considerable ideological force. It is all very well to argue for the irrelevance of the 'native speaker' as a concept, but when job advertisements for teachers continue to specify 'native speakers' it can be seen that the label has real effects on people's lives. For reasons of both ontology and ideology, then, the terms are problematic. There seem to be three possibilities in these and similar cases. The first is to adopt alternative terms, such as NBES (Non-Bilingual English Speaker) and BES (Bilingual English Speaker), introduced by Jenkins (2000). There is often an overt polemic in these renamings, which in Jenkins's case represents an attempt to invert the hierarchy and return the term 'native' to its 'pejorative usage' (Jenkins 2000: 229). The second possibility is to use scare quotes around 'native speaker' and 'non-native speaker' to denote their provisional and unsatisfactory status; this can reduce readability. The third possibility is the careful interrogation

of the existing terminology, as part of a justification for continuing to use it. I will mainly take this approach here. Accordingly, the terms native speaker and non-native speaker are used with full recognition of their unsatisfactory denotation and ideological undertones. The idea of 'functional nativeness' (e.g. Graddol 2006) is fully accepted, and the book attempts to undermine the native/non-native distinction, reconfiguring the hierarchy rather than trying to invert it.

Similar questions of description and its effects arise from the labelling and compartmentalization of global English. Within the World Englishes approach, variation is mainly captured by geographically based categories, such as 'Hong Kong English' – here I may not be able to avoid the use of scare quotes, as I will argue that the labels themselves are problematic. As part of its remit, in all three areas – theory, pedagogy and polemics – this book explores the nature, ideological origins and limitations of such categorizations, using Hong Kong as a case study. Among the many problems with these labels are that they imply local distinctiveness to be the exception, rather than the norm; the English used in Hong Kong cannot avoid having Hong Kong characteristics. The labels are interpreted very differently by linguists and language users, however, and Ramanathan (2005: 119) points out that it is only outside India that Indian English is seen as a 'variety'. Variety labels create the misleading impression of unity, of 'shared' surface features and a common or 'underlying' system. Diversity is thus downplayed, rather than highlighted, under this approach. Terms such as 'English in Hong Kong' and 'Hong Kong English accents', in the plural, are therefore preferred.

Finally, I come to the term 'global English'. This has nothing to do with the standardizing tendencies suggested by singular labels such as World Standard Spoken English (Crystal 2012: 185). On the contrary, the singular, inclusive form is used here to emphasize the diversity and interconnectedness of *all* English use (Pennycook 2010: 685). The apparently singular appellation actually reflects multiplicity, and the desire to move beyond the 'boxes and circles', the distinct 'varieties', that have for too long constrained the study of English (Pennycook 2010: 685). Within the term 'global English' there is full recognition of diversity, within and between individuals, regions, social classes and genres of communication. As Wallace (2002: 107) observes, global English will always be 'differently inflected in different contexts'.

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2   Global English

A sociolinguistic toolkit

Pronunciation teaching takes place within a milieu that is at once local and global. Despite the complexity of the milieu, we need to try and comprehend its nature in order to understand the phenomena of accent and pronunciation and to make effective recommendations for teaching. We also need to understand the nature of *responses* to this complexity, in terms of research and pedagogical approaches. This chapter surveys some of the research orientations and concepts that can help with an understanding of the wider milieu in which pronunciation teaching takes place. It first considers the nature of globalization and of the local/global relationship, drawing on insights from social theory. These theoretical orientations are then linked with sociolinguistic approaches to global English; the notion of *practices* emerges as a common strand. The chapter then outlines a conceptual toolkit, the contents of which are discussed with particular reference to accent and pronunciation. This includes scales, indexicality and polycentricity (Blommaert 2010), ideologies of language and commodification. The chapter concludes with an introduction to two research paradigms that have particular relevance to language and pronunciation teaching in the era of globalization: World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca.

Globalization and global English: theory and practices

The term 'globalization' is probably 'the most widely used buzzword of the early twentieth century' (Inglis and Thorpe 2012: 258). It involves several interconnected dimensions or themes, including economics, culture, identity, politics and technology (Block and Cameron 2002: 5). Debates about globalization cluster around these themes, and include questions such as when it started, whether or not it is a homogenizing process, whether its 'positives' outweigh its 'negatives', and so on (Block and Cameron 2002: 2–5). Despite the unfamiliarity of the terrain, hovering above the 'local/global' interaction there are the familiar analytical oppositions of social theory: macro/micro, social/individual, structure/agency and so on (Layder 1994: 131).

Sociolinguistic responses to the phenomena of globalization display close parallels with those of social theory, and often draw upon them to inform the theorization of interconnectedness. If the notion of a 'society' as a self-enclosed,

bounded entity has come under heavy criticism in social theory (Inglis and Thorpe 2012: 259), then notions such as 'community' and 'language' have been extensively problematized in sociolinguistics. The overall effect of globalization can be summarized as one of breaking down familiar borders, changing the meaning of these notions and of the terms 'local' and 'global'. On the one hand, this may not be as new as it first appears. From the perspective of the 'sociolinguistics of globalization' (e.g. Blommaert 2010), the conceptual toolkit of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was what led to the perception of bounded entities in the first place. The local is not, and has never been, merely about 'smallness or proximity' (Pennycook 2010: 54).

On the other hand, what has changed under globalization is the speed at which exchanges take place, and the range of spaces and places that are involved. There are important consequences for the nature of language use, for the theorization of language use and for the ways in which languages are taught. To return to the dimensions of globalization mentioned above, some of the most relevant to this book are those of identity, culture and technology. The accent-related stories in Chapter 1 have already indicated the close connection between accent and identity. By considering the nature of globalization we realize that it challenges notions of stable identities associated with predictable categories, such as nationality, ethnicity and social class. In sketching the nature of the 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007) that characterizes globalization, Arnaut (2012: 6) notes the tendency for subjects to be 'constantly open … for calibrations or alignments in various directions'. In more familiar terms, people increasingly belong to multiple communities, both real and imagined, and signal different affiliations in their interactions.

Poststructuralist theories of language have also contributed to a view of identity as being 'multiple, changing and a site of struggle' (Norton 2014: 63). Maher (2010) explores the relationship between identity and culture through his concept of 'metroethnicity'. This draws attention to the hybrid and cosmopolitan identities that coexist with more traditional loyalties, and to cultural phenomena that are 'underground' (*métro*) – a 'multiple signifier' which includes the sense of undermining 'bordered perceptions of ethnicity and language' (Maher 2010: 577). Technology is also important in heightening the flows of information that generate and sustain these constantly evolving identity positions and cultural phenomena. Concepts such as metroethnicity are useful in reminding us that 'American accent' does not necessarily equate with American identity; there is scope for play (Maher 2010) and recombination.

In terms of studies of global English, one of the most important consequences of this 'bonfire of the certainties' is that concepts of 'local varieties' are also destabilized. This is so whether one considers the nature of the local or the concept of a 'variety'. On the one hand, an enhanced awareness of the 'local' leads to the realization that English 'has always been local' (Pennycook 2010: 131). The English used in Hong Kong cannot avoid having Hong Kong characteristics. On the other hand, if we combine this awareness with an understanding of the sociohistorical and ideological construction of language varieties, we soon realize that a traditional view of 'Hong Kong English' as a bounded entity is likely to

be problematic in several ways. The challenge for research – and, it is argued here, for language teaching – is to find ways of acknowledging local variation without reifying 'local varieties' that merely mirror nation-state boundaries, largely ignoring the complexities of identity and the permeability of linguistic and cultural borders.

Another, more general challenge for research is provided by the nature of these 'flows', however: metaphors of 'flow' may obscure the economic factors which shape them (Block 2012: 74), and for some observers global modernity distributes 'both its goods and its "bads" along some pretty familiar lines of entrenched social division' (Tomlinson 1999: 63, citing Massey 1994). There are enormous and increasing inequalities, and constraints on the extent to which English can participate in identity construction. If English is one of the cultural codes that controls access to the 'network society' of Castells (2010), its use is often constrained by people's ability to deploy socially valued forms of English within these networks.

Issues of power and freedom remain important considerations, suggesting that one of the most important dualities in social theory, namely that between *structure* and *agency*, is still relevant. Structure can refer to slightly different things: to a social entity, to the organizational principles of an entity, or to the tendency towards persistent patterns of behaviour (Elder-Vass 2012: 21). For Layder (1994: 210) structure is 'the way in which the social context shapes and moulds activity and behaviour'. Agency is concerned with 'the degree to which individuals are capable of changing the circumstances in which they find themselves and of responding creatively to social constraints' which affect the social relationships in which they are embedded' (Layder 1994: 210).

One of the central problems for both social theory and sociolinguistics can therefore be stated as: how can we avoid privileging either all-powerful structures (societies, systems and institutions) or individual freedom in our approaches to social and linguistic phenomena? How can there be both stability and the possibility for change? In social theory, structurationist approaches (e,g. Giddens 1984; Bourdieu 1990) try to avoid giving too much emphasis to either structure or agency. The distinction between them can disappear, to some extent, because structuring influences are seen to be the effects of human activity rather than pre-existing and predetermining them. Despite differences of emphasis, structurationist approaches involve a preoccupation with *practices* as the proper focus of attention – not underlying systems or structures, and not individuals or isolated interactions either, but patterns of human activity. These patterns are what give rise to the *appearance* of structure. Crucially, and partly explaining its appeal for sociolinguistics, a focus on practices allows for the theorization of change; according to Swidler (2001: 79) 'transformation as well as continuity of structures is possible'.

Practice-based perspectives

Recent approaches to global English (e.g. Pennycook 2010; Park and Wee 2012; Canagarajah 2013) have focused on the notion of practices. This can be

seen as a sociolinguistic response to questions of structure/agency, individual/ social and micro/macro, one that addresses the possibility of change in the way global English is conceptualized or taught. I shall here describe some elements of what may be called practice-based perspectives on language and social activity, without meaning to imply that they form any kind of unified approach. Practices are 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (Schatzki 2001: 2). Focusing on practices means gaining a sense of how social behaviour and activity become routinized, without buying into the idea of external or pre-existing structures. According to Pennycook (2010: 28), practices 'bridge the gap between individual behaviour and social and cultural structure, while also drawing attention to the importance of repeated activity'. The emergence of practice-based approaches has been noted across a range of disciplines, as thinkers retreat from 'structures', 'systems' and the like (Schatzki 2001: 1).

From a practice-based viewpoint, language is seen as discursive activity and hence as an aspect of practices. Institutions and structures are *effects* of these practices (Schatzki 2001: 3). Canagarajah (2013: 27) offers a useful insight into the nature of a practice-based view in sociolinguistics, showing how it emphasizes the mutual constitution of the local and the global, and of structure and agency. The 'local' is not merely a stage for the reception of prevailing 'global' forms, but a generative setting: 'conditions in the local context have implications for the meanings and forms that are generated'(Canagarajah 2013: 27). In much the same way, the social context of interaction is not merely a neutral space in which cognition or various aspects of 'structure' are realized. The process of communication 'reflexively alters context, changing the terms of engagement and meaning' (Canagarajah 2013: 27). While earlier studies tended to see variation as a reflection of pre-existing categories such as ethnicity, class or gender, more recent work (e.g. Eckert 2008) has tried to show how people *construct* social meaning and identity in the process of interaction, again with an emphasis on practices. Nevertheless, there are certain constraints, and – as with structurationist approaches – the challenge is to avoid unduly emphasizing the poles of either agency or structure, and to acknowledge their interrelationship. In its application to identity, a practice-based view acknowledges the relationship between 'reproduced or socially and culturally defined aspects of identity and the creative interpretation and modification of these aspects by unique individuals' (Trent *et al.* 2014: 8).

The significance of practice-based perspectives for studies of global English is twofold: they offer important guides for the theorization of language phenomena, including those of accent and pronunciation, and they help to characterize the social milieu in which these phenomena occur. Practice-based perspectives have a number of influences, and take on a variety of forms and names. Robinson (2003) distinguishes between what he calls *constative* linguistics – concerned with structural abstraction, an 'objective' approach to form and meaning, and rule-governedness – and *performative* linguistics, in which it is 'the act of people creating meanings with words that gives shape to our beliefs and values, social

and cultural structures' (Robinson 2003: 8). In its more linguistic manifestations, a practice-based view tends to foreground the negotiated, situated, emergent nature of meaning-making.

But there is actually a continuum of approaches, and various analytical positionings between 'language as system' and 'language as emergent meaning-in-interaction' are possible (Robinson 2003: 6). Current pedagogical responses to global English are particularly concerned with the nature of this continuum; I have already mentioned what Sussex and Kirkpatrick (2012: 225) call the 'SEE' (system-entity-edifice) and 'LFE' (Lingua Franca English) perspectives. The 'system/emergence' question that is raised by this continuum has some parallels with the more general questions of structure/agency, and it is of course a long-running concern in the study of language. Referring to Bakhtin's attempts to understand the paradox, Clark and Holquist (1984: 10) ask how it is that the structural aspect, the recurring features and 'shared meanings' required for understanding, can coexist with the emergent aspect, the innovations and the need for new meanings in 'the countless different contexts created by the flux of everyday life'.

Contemporary approaches to global English, such as English as a Lingua Franca, perhaps tend to emphasize the emergent aspects of language. But this position on the continuum – what might be called a 'strong' practice approach – is sometimes in danger of implying that there are no systematic aspects to language at all, that it emerges anew in each interaction. Hall (2013: 220) calls this viewpoint 'transient Englishing', and cites Johnstone (2002) as an example: '[t]o think of discourse as "language use" means imagining that "language" could exist prior to being "used"'. Applying a combination of cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, Hall (2013) argues that such a view is unsustainable: speakers acquire knowledge of communicative signs, their semantic and social meanings, their denotations and connotations, and bring this with them to communicative encounters. Speakers can thus be said to possess 'systems of declarative knowledge which, by their very nature, must align with those of other members of the species in a common intersubjective social space' (Hall 2013: 217).

Hall's position is therefore also a critique of the 'disinvention and reconstitution' project of Makoni and Pennycook (2007), according to which English 'does not exist as a prior system but is produced and sedimented through acts of identity' (Pennycook 2007: 110). On the othe hand, it appears that Hall's position is in danger of substituting individual, overlapping systems for the 'one big system' of language, when practice-based approaches might suggest that what is needed is 'to eschew this talk of system' (Cooper 2008: 51). Although the practice-based view tends to de-emphasize systems, cognitive factors and the Cartesian separation of 'mind' or 'mental states' (Schatzki 2001: 7), its usefulness resembles that of structurationist approaches in social theory: it avoids the extremes of either individualism or sociostructural determinism. It therefore offers a corrective to the tendency to think in terms of abstract or underlying 'systems', or to place too much emphasis on what speakers have 'in common'. In Chapter 4 I will explore the system–emergence relationship in more detail through a detailed consideration

of intelligibility. The practice-based view will inform both this discussion and subsequent approaches to the wider sociolinguistic milieu, including the notion of 'Hong Kong English'.

A sociolinguistic toolkit for global English

In dealing with global English, sociolinguistics therefore draws upon theorizations of globalization, and reflects different approaches to the agency/structure, individual/social and micro/macro relationships. The concept of *practices* has become prominent, as outlined above, both in terms of approaching linguistic phenomena and understanding the wider milieu of social relations. In addition to these general orientations, there are also specific concepts that are useful in navigating global English. In outlining the contents of a sociolinguistic toolkit, this section draws upon the general framework provided by Blommaert's (2010) sociolinguistics of globalization. The concepts examined here are scales, indexicality, polycentricity, language and ideology, and commodification. They are discussed with particular reference to matters of accent and pronunciation.

Scales

Originating from studies of history and human geography, the concept of *scales* has been adopted in sociolinguistics in order to schematize certain aspects of the local/global interplay. In the approach of Blommaert (2007, 2010), there are two important emphases: first, space not only extends horizontally, but is also visualized as being *vertically* stratified. The vertical dimension creates an awareness of how different kinds of language are perceived in a hierarchical way, as 'higher' and 'lower', 'better' and 'worse', depending on the situation. These perceptions are not uniform or uncontested, and may vary from person to person, from place to place, and from situation to situation. An accent that is positively evaluated as 'global' or at least 'translocal' in the speaker's home context may not receive the same evaluation elsewhere; certain kinds of language have limited mobility potential (Blommaert 2010: 12). In the 'accent school' story presented in Chapter 1, the Hong Kong interviewee characterized local accents as being more British than American; in Britain or America, however, such accents may be perceived as merely 'foreign'. The vertical dimension of scales therefore focuses our attention on issues of power and inequality from the outset. Their effects can be seen in every interaction (Blommaert 2007: 7), rather than being treated as abnormal.

Second, scalar theory also theorizes, in addition to these spatial and social aspects, the *temporal* dimension of communication. While acts of communication can be seen as taking place in, and referring to space – here/there, local/translocal, us/them – they also take place in time, and emphasize different aspects of it: past, present or future, momentary or timeless, and so on. The interdependence of the spatial and temporal is the origin of Blommaert's observation that every social event 'develops simultaneously in space and in time, often in multiply imagined spaces and time frames' (Blommaert 2007: 5). The notion of simultaneity (see

Arnaut 2012) also captures the interdependence of space and time, and the fact of their 'compression' under conditions of globalization. This interdependence can be pictured in several ways. As part of his discussion of super-diversity, Vertovec (2007: 34) observes that people can engage in 'multiple transnational processes at the same time' (cited in Arnaut 2012: 4). In other words, they refer to and situate themselves within multiple communities, both real and imagined, sometimes even within a single utterance. Linguistic phenomena such as code-mixing can also be interpreted from the perspective of simultaneity; seen in this light, code-mixing is not so much the sequential combination of items from 'separate' languages as 'the interaction of co-present thoughts' (Rampton 1995: 278, in Arnaut 2012: 4).

These formulations of space and time yield a number of crucial insights. Speakers are oriented not only towards the immediate context of their communicative activity, but also towards 'higher-level, non-immediate complexes of perceived meaningfulness' (Blommaert 2005: 73). There is a constant combination of spatiotemporal elements. Acts of communication may appear to contain a spatial dimension by implying that 'this is our local way of talking' or that 'this is the way we usually speak about such things'. But in such acts, there is also a temporal dimension in terms of emphasizing continuity or change. The 'our' and the 'we' may involve attempts to *establish* or imagine community, rather than simply representing it. There are acts of communication that leave the social context relatively unchanged, and others that intend to act upon or change the context; this is the distinction between the 'presupposing' and the 'creative' or 'entailing' orientations (Silverstein 1976). We can begin to understand why ideology is seen as central to language use, from the linguistic-anthropological perspective (e.g. Blommaert 2007; see also Gal and Irvine 1995).

A scalar perspective helps us to remember that dimensions such as 'local' and 'global' are not easily separable, and are not merely about space and place; they are also about power, the stratification of language, and relative (rather than absolute) meanings of local and global. But while a scalar approach allows us to visualize the complexities of language use under globalization, it appears to swing the analytical pendulum firmly towards structure. It has been criticized by Canagarajah (2013: 157–8) for being overly normative and impersonal, for implying that scales shape people – in other words, for privileging structure over agency. In theory, scales should offer 'the sense that categories are not pre-existent but talked into being interactively' (Baynham 2009: 136).

The challenge, according to Canagarajah (2013: 157–8) is to accommodate a more dynamic view of norms and a more agent-focused view of scales, without succumbing to 'postmodern fragmentation'. The view one takes partly depends on the purpose of the analysis. Canagarajah is keen to show how people attempt to renegotiate norms and reconstruct meanings in an agentic manner, while Blommaert's focus is on the interaction of the macro and the micro, and on the pervasiveness of 'higher' and 'lower' in terms of evaluation. The struggle is indeed Bakhtinian in that 'a focus on practices and emerging structures/normativities does not preclude a topography of (relative) inequality, of "high" and "low"' (Arnaut 2012: 8).

In this book, the concept of scales is mainly used to inform the general theme of interconnectedness, mentioned in Chapter 1. Acts of communication are characterized by multiple and shifting references to 'local' and 'translocal' dimensions, and also include elements of time. Under conditions of globalization, there is a tendency towards time-space compression (Harvey 1989); speakers may relate to several different norms at the same time, use different norms on different occasions or combine elements from different languages to express their stances or identities. Speakers have agency, but this is exerted within constraints; some structures and their associated practices are 'deeper, more powerful, more fundamental than others' (Swidler 2001: 81). There is pervasive normativity (Blommaert and Rampton 2011), and evaluations of 'better' and 'worse' forms of communication persist. Explorations of accent may be particularly revealing in this respect, and may have important implications for the teaching of pronunciation.

Indexicality

To understand how scales relate to the creation of social meaning, the concept of indexicality needs to be introduced into the toolkit. Indexicality has the general sense of deixis or 'pointing out from the text to the world' (Collins *et al.* 2009: 7). But indexicality is also the way in which the world enters the text, whether written or spoken: it forms 'the route whereby scale enters into meaning making' (Collins *et al.* 2009: 6). It not only 'points to' the social world, but also maintains it; indexicality is closely related to identity. Acts of communication are also acts of identity (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), and these are multidimensional in that they index 'ethnicity, nationality, social class, gender, and other dimensions of identity at the same time' (Block 2007: 40).

Acts of identity do not take place within a vacuum, however. They involve the effects of structure, as well as agency, and they have to be recognized, as well as performed (Blommaert 2006, in Block 2007: 26). As the 'power-saturated' scalar view of Blommaert suggests, distinctions may be contentious. But regardless of their nature and role in communicative acts, they are made by and through the indexical properties of communicative signs. As an initial approach to indexicality, and as a way of understanding communicative interaction in general, it is worth examining in more detail how this works. The concept of the polarity – manifested in evaluative orientations such as high/low, better/worse, relaxed/effortful and so on – is an important one here. For Silverstein (2003: 202), evaluational stances take the form of paired oppositions such as good/bad, preferred/dispreferred, normal/deviant and so on.

The polarity concept can be developed further into what Eckert (2008) calls an indexical field: a constellation of potential meanings formed by the existence of multiple and overlapping polarities. Leimgruber (2013) uses an indexical field approach in his study of Singapore English, building upon the Cultural Orientation Model (COM) of Alsagoff (2007, 2010); the central polarity is 'local/global', and each pole is associated with different values such as informality, friendliness, camaraderie and so on. We first need to clarify what 'polarity' means in this

context. In the approach taken by Ugazio (2013) in her intersubjective approach to personality, terms in polar opposition are not 'opposites' in the usual sense. Rather, they have a mutually interdependent relationship in which one derives its meaning from the other (p. 37). In Ugazio's terms, the 'semantic polarities' developed in conversation establish intersubjectivity; this means that they serve to relate individuals to each other, enabling them to function within group structures (Ugazio 2013: 38).

There are at least two implications arising from this. First, the sense of 'identity' that emerges is one that again emphasizes its fluidity and multiplicity. Identity is seen to be 'precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak' (Weedon 1997: 32, in Block 2007: 14). Second, the intrusion of the 'group' into what initially seems to be an individual, identity-oriented concept alerts us to the fact that indexicality is inherently ideological, relying on sociohistorically constructed meanings and group-based power relations. The scalar approach, in which indexicality plays a central role, has already suggested the inescapable influence of power relations in social life and communication.

I will focus here on two aspects of indexicality identified by Blommaert (2007, 2010), namely *indexical order* and – perhaps confusingly – *orders of indexicality*. Indexical order refers to the fact that indexical meanings, both linguistic and non-linguistic, tend to cluster together in 'patterns offering perceptions of similarity and stability that can be perceived as "types" of semiotic practice' (Blommaert 2010: 37). There are various reasons for this, but one is related to the need for utterances, and social performances, to be recognized by others. As such, indexical orders can be seen as simultaneously enabling and constraining. Employing an established indexical order and adhering to existing norms may be unproblematic, in which case we tend towards reproduction. However, if conflicts or ambiguities arise, it may be necessary to hybridize, subvert or resist indexicalities in subtle or not-so-subtle ways (Elder-Vass 2012: 113).

The accent-related study of Dong and Blommaert (2009) shows how scales and indexicality can be applied in sociolinguistic research. The study analyses a conversation between Dong and a migrant street vendor in Beijing, in which the vendor used accents and other elements from three different Chinese language varieties: Beijing dialect, his 'original' southern Chinese dialect and Putonghua, or the national standard. These dialects, though variable, show the clustering of features associated with indexical orders. They are used purposefully, to 'project multilayered identities' (Dong and Blommaert 2009: 59). Beijing dialect is used at the start of the encounter to index a local identity, one that the vendor presumably thinks may be shared with the interlocutor; Putonghua is used to index a national identity, as well as projecting facets of personal identity such as having a high-school education; and southern dialect is used to index a non-local identity and achieve authenticity when talking about local (i.e. southern Chinese) food.

Dong and Blommaert (2009: 58) describe these shifts of accent as revealing the migrant worker's 'polyglot repertoire', and the ways in which this repertoire is 'organized indexically in relation to layered and stratified spaces'. The

indexical properties of the different accents also expand the temporal frames of reference; along with the spatial move from 'local' to 'national' there is also a temporal move from the ephemeral to the durable, from the here-and-now of the encounter to the relative stability of the institutions and culture that the 'standard' language emblematizes (Silverstein 1996: 298). In a similar way, the prestige status of the Beijing accent is also projected sociohistorically (Dong and Blommaert, 2009: 55).

While 'indexical order' suggests the internal coherence and relative predictability of these accents and their features, what propels these moves is an awareness of the *order of indexicality*, or the way in which 'particular indexical orders relate to others in relations of mutual valuation – higher/lower, better/worse' (Blommaert 2010: 38). Systemic patterns of indexicality are subject to a 'politics of access', and these patterns are also 'patterns of authority, of control and evaluation, and hence of inclusion and exclusion by *real and perceived others*' (Blommaert 2010: 38, emphasis in original).

The dual nature of indexicality as both constraining and enabling can be pondered over using this example. In Dong and Blommaert's portrayal it is seen as mainly enabling. Indexical orders – in this case, dialects and accents involving well-known features in recurring combinations – can be exploited as a resource in the construction of identity positions. These positions in turn rely on orders of indexicality for their social meaning and interpretation. From this perspective the normativity of indexicality enables, creating the possibility for successful performance and reducing the amount of unpredictability in social life. Woolard (2004: 88) further illustrates this view of indexicality:

> if a certain linguistic variety is associated with the authority of the classroom or court, it may come to be heard as authoritative language. Its use in a different context can then itself signify authority, in a creative form of indexicality.

But arguably, the 'creativity' here is limited to the reproduction of linguistic and social order, albeit in a different context. As Canagarajah (2013: 157) puts it with regard to Dong and Blommaert's study, people are shown to be 'moving across scales and norms that are already available, rather than renegotiating their values … or complicating the orders of indexicality'. From this perspective, the picture that emerges in this study is one of people being relatively powerless in the face of pre-existing social categories, or perhaps exploiting them in a rather predictable and defensive manner – in short, and as with the concept of scales, it suggests the triumph of structure over agency.

Canagarajah's own study emphasized agency by focusing on the renegotiation of indexicality in interaction. The interviewees in the study – African migrants working in various occupations in the UK and the US – are portrayed as contesting some aspects of the scales and orders of indexicality that might otherwise put them at a disadvantage. They do this by indexing, for example, their superior level of education, their professional authority and expertise, or the perceived 'timelessness' and status of non-local (in one case, British English) norms as

opposed to temporally and spatially situated American English norms. They also use communicative strategies that enable them to partly overcome the effects of indexicality and stereotyping, changing the encounter's 'footing' (Goffman 1981) by manipulating interpersonal stances and the content of the interaction. The emergent, entailing aspects of communicative practices are emphasized here.

Although indexicality emerges as a useful concept in these and similar studies, we can already see that we need to be careful with the concepts of 'accents' and 'language varieties'. We can never be sure which polarities are involved, or how they are experienced by speakers and listeners. For example, how do we decide which accents people are using, or know how they are perceived? The perspectives of users and producers, and of participants and analysts, may be quite different. Some might see 'the same' accent or variety as a routine performance, drawing on existing indexicalities, whereas others might see it as imbued with nuances ranging from the satirical to the subversive. Canagarajah's study states that the immigrants are 'retaining their distinctive varieties of English' (2013: 161), but given the complexities of indexical orders and orders of indexicality, how do we know what this means? Rather than a national or regional variety, the listeners may have perceived registers such as 'international professional English', say, or 'medical English'. Accent features may have played a role in these performances by mainly indexing 'standard' or 'professional' polarities, rather than 'regional' ones.

Along with scales, indexicality is a powerful concept in terms of its ability to link structure and agency, and to connect the micro-level of interaction with macro-level considerations. It allows for a clearer understanding of how language and semiotic practices are both internally coherent (they tend to co-occur in more-or-less predictable patterns) and externally or socially meaningful (they help to position the speaker in social space). Although indexical associations are 'inherently ideological' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 596), the concept of indexicality leaves a space for agency and identity in the theorization of global English. It is also highly relevant to the study of accent phenomena; spoken language is particularly sensitive to the indexical potential generated by contextual or audience factors.

Polycentricity

To gain a sense of what these 'contextual or audience factors' are, Blommaert's (2010) concept of polycentricity is also useful. This further illustrates the interaction of the macro and the micro, and the ways in which large-scale 'global' processes affect interaction. When we communicate, we address ourselves not only to the immediate audience but also to what Bakhtin (1986) termed a 'super-addressee' (see Blommaert 2010: 39). In Blommaert's terms this means 'complexes of norms and perceived appropriateness criteria … the larger social and cultural body into which we insert our immediate practices' (Blommaert 2010: 39). The polycentric 'body' takes the form of perceived evaluative centres, ranging from individuals (parents, teachers, cultural and countercultural role models) to collectives (peer groups, workplaces) and ideals ('freedom',

'equality', 'refinement' and so on; Blommaert 2010: 39). These centres therefore include *actual* normative influences, operating in particular situations and relationships, as well as *imagined* ones. For example, students learning English in Hong Kong might orient towards an American accent because they have spent time in the US, or because their teacher prefers it and responds positively to it (there is some evidence for this in Chapter 7). But it may also be because their favourite movie stars are American, or because they associate it with 'global' or 'cosmopolitan' values.

As the preceding discussion of scales and simultaneity suggests, the very nature of these centres is to exert simultaneous effects on interaction and identity. Because we belong to multiple, intersecting 'communities', both real and imagined, we speak in different ways to different people. Polycentricity also undermines the very concept of 'the language', and consequently that of monolingualism – even if we think we are speaking 'the same' language, every language is a multiplicity of codes (Croft 2000: 92). Polycentricity operates constantly, and a change of topic may be sufficient to evoke different registers and even accents (Blommaert 2010: 39). In these shifts we may orient towards different centres of authority, each with different norms and appropriateness criteria. We will often have to accommodate and blend several centres at the same time; as Elder-Vass (2012: 29) observes, using the term 'normative circles' instead of 'centres', skilled social performances 'depend on a complex practical consciousness of the diversity, relevance and extent of the range of normative circles in an individual's environment'.

As Elder-Vass's concept of normative circles suggests, one of the advantages of polycentricity is that it introduces a sophisticated awareness of *normativity* into the theorization of global English. It avoids the rather simplistic dichotomization of 'exonormative' (region-external) and 'endonormative' (region-internal) often found in World Englishes research, and instead recognizes that normativity is inherent in language use, and polycentric in operation. In addition to the influence of centres of normativity, which can involve real or imagined modes of belonging, we also need to see these phenomena as involving different time frames. Many shifts of communicative behaviour, including those involving accent, are motivated by *stances* – emergent orientations towards the communicative situation. The accent study of Altendorf (2003) is interesting in that it links the situational adoption of certain British accents and accent features with temporary stances such as 'selected naughtiness', 'relaxed style' and 'not sounding common' (Altendorf 2003: 152–4). However, temporary stances or 'acts of identity' have the potential to accumulate into more durable structures of identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 596).

The relationship between accent and identity is something that I will take up in more detail in the following chapter. To summarize the sections above, the concepts of scales, indexicality and polycentricity are useful navigational aids in approaching the complexity of global English, and the role of accent within this. They theorize the links between levels such as local/global, and individual/social, and provide a useful corrective to notions of unified communities, identities and language varieties. But as Canagarajah's criticism of scales suggests, they may be in danger of emphasizing structure over agency, and of portraying the

individual as a pawn-like figure. The alternative position of emphasizing agency, for example by focusing on acts of identity or resistance in language use, also has disadvantages; we tend to forget the constraints, and the fact that acts of resistance quickly become centres, in Blommaert's sense, with normative effects of their own. To avoid succumbing to 'structure paralysis' or 'agency celebration', an understanding of the workings of ideology may be useful.

Language and ideology

As Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 596) note, the process of creating indexical ties is 'inherently ideological' in the way it creates a set of interactional norms for particular social groups. From the linguistic-anthropological perspective (e.g. Agha 2007; Silverstein 1979), ideology is seen as an intrinsic aspect of the structure of language, its perceived meanings, and its role in the construction of communities and identities (Park 2009: 13; see also Gal and Irvine 1995; Irvine and Gal 2000; Kroskrity 2004). It thus needs to be taken account of in theoretical approaches to global English.

There is also a practical justification for adopting an 'ideological' standpoint: language ideologies affect attitudes towards language and towards language teaching. I will consider specific manifestations of language ideology, such as the 'standard language ideology', as part of the survey of the Hong Kong context in Chapter 6. The focus here is on the general significance of ideology in language use, as it helps to increase our understanding of the significance of accent. Echoing Blommaert's account of the 'mutual valuation' underlying indexicality, Silverstein's view of interaction is that:

> cultural values … emerge in the micro-contextual dialectic as essentializations (frequently straightforward naturalizations) of a kind of 'logic' of evaluational stances (good/bad; preferred/dispreferred; normal/deviant; etc.) underlying social partitioning.
>
> (Silverstein 2003: 202)

As in Blommaert's account of scales, we again see the use of polarities to highlight the relational nature of stance and meaning, but with increased attention to ideological processes such as essentialization and naturalization. The tendency for group characteristics to be seen as 'natural' (as having co-evolved seamlessly with the group) or 'essential' (as being defining characteristics of the group) explains why indexicality is seen as inherently ideological. Eckert (2008) also relates indexicality to ideology in a 'structurationist' manner; variation constitutes 'an indexical system that embeds ideology in language and is in turn part and parcel of the construction of ideology' (Eckert 2008: 454). In the process of identity formation, indexicality 'relies heavily on ideological structures, for associations between language and identity are rooted in cultural beliefs and values – that is, ideologies – about the sorts of speakers who (can or should) produce particular sorts of language' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 594).

Ideology can also be related to indexicality, and in turn to Blommaert's indexical orders, via the concept of *enregisterment* (Agha 2005, 2007). This is the process by which 'distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized … as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users' (Agha 2005: 38). In the terminology of the previous sections, it describes the formation of an indexical order – a cluster of co-occurring linguistic and non-linguistic signs – and explains how this comes to be evaluated in similar ways within a community. The evaluation may be either 'better' or 'worse', depending on the audience or sector of 'the community'. But as was seen in Dong and Blommaert's study of Chinese accents, the relative predictability of evaluative response enables an indexical order to be utilized, by those who possess the means, as a semiotic resource. The other important aspect of enregisterment is that an indexical order, such as a particular accent, comes to index attributes or qualities of the speaker and of the *group* or category which he or she is seen to represent. To successfully employ an indexical order is to draw on stereotypical representations of 'categories of personhood' (Agha 2007: 239).

Enregisterment can take place in any language-using community, but it is normally associated with more macro levels: regional dialects such as Pittsburghese (Johnstone 2010), and national languages or registers such as RP (Received Pronunciation) in the UK (Agha 2007). At these macro levels, the process of enregisterment typically occurs across different discursive sites. The enregisterment of the RP accent involved schools, dictionaries, language guides for popular consumption, and portrayals in film and literature, among others. During these processes of circulation, accent features come to index 'characterological stereotypes', increasing their semiotic potential by linking forms with recognizable figures – images of people in society, who have ways of speaking, along with ways of behaving (Agha 2007; see also Park and Wee 2012).

To further understand the link between enregisterment, indexicality and ideology, Silverstein's (2003) version of *orders of indexicality* is useful. In Silverstein's model, first-order indexicality allows for the identification of speaker variables such as gender or geographical origin, variables that might be seen as relatively 'value-free' (Joseph 2010: 17). However, 'identification' cannot be entirely value-free; as Eckert (2008: 473) observes, 'the very fact of distinction of social groups entails evaluation'. Higher-order indexicality (Silverstein 2003: 226) means that variables and registers associated with particular groups come to index qualities that are associated – rightly or wrongly – with those groups, in such a way that the qualities appear to be inherent to the group. Irvine and Gal (2000: 37) use the term iconization to refer to this process: linguistic features that index social groups or activities 'appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence'.

As suggested by Irvine and Gal's definition, the processes of enregisterment do not only apply to the language 'varieties' associated with regional or national groups. Silverstein's (2003) account takes the example of oinoglossia, the language employed to talk about wine. The near-magical semiotic transformations

of enregisterment can be observed in the activity of wine tasting and its associated register or 'lingo':

> We can see immediately that … wine tasting and its all-important verbalization in the tasting note … is *culturally eucharistic*: by using the lingo in context, the lingo has the indexically entailing effect or creative power to index consubstantial traits in the speaker.
>
> (Silverstein 2003: 226)

By 'consubstantial' Silverstein means that through adept use of the register in context, by performing it successfully, speakers *become* the characterological type ('subtle, balanced. intriguing') corresponding to the enregistered 'fashion of speaking' (Silverstein 2003: 226).

All of this tells us that accents are not only bundles of linguistic features – they are ways of speaking, ways of being in the world. They have an embodied dimension, which may involve particular ways of behaving. They evoke reactions based on listeners' previous experience of these ways of speaking, and of the 'images of personhood' (Agha 2007: 233) with which they are associated. These insights further develop our understanding of accent, and also help to explain the commodification of accents in the global marketplace.

Commodification

Blommaert (2010) devotes several pages to the phenomenon of accent commodification, which in commercial terms usually involves the American English accent. He notes (2010: 59) that 'the object of globalized commodification is accent and not language'. Nation-states and other 'macro' normative centres are not usually concerned about accent, and it therefore becomes the focus of attention for 'globalised, private enterprise actors' such as accent reduction schools (2010: 48). I will return to this aspect of commodification in Chapter 3, but some introductory observations are needed here.

Park and Wee (2012: 125) define commodification as involving 'the conditions under which language comes to be valued and sought for the economic profit it can bring through exchange on the market, rather than for some other form of significance'. They point out that some may see this as a transformation in the relationship between language and identity: 'having a native-like accent in English might be seen as an index of a speaker's identity in one context and a resource for getting a particular job in another context'. But this is hardly a new phenomenon. Language plays both identity-related and commodifying roles in complex societies marked by social mobility, and accent commodification has a long history. Seen in this light, the 'accent reduction' industry represents a contemporary, globalized version of the pronunciation guides that became popular during the eighteenth century (Agha 2007: 207).

In considering commodification, one might distinguish between producers and consumers. The types of products – from tutors, style guides and elocution

classes, to internet-based accent reduction classes – may change over time, but the drive to consume them remains much the same. The commercial products of accent commodification play on the ambition and insecurity of the upwardly-mobile. As new social horizons open up, first under industrial capitalism and then under globalization, the demand (or the need) for mobility increases, as does the potential for linguistic *faux pas* and their real or imagined consequences. The noticeability of accent, and the insecurities it provokes, make it a particularly marketable commodity.

Again, what has changed under globalization is the scale and speed at which commodification operates, as call centre operators in India sign up for American accent courses – courses that may not even be based in the US. Lysandrou and Lysandrou (2003: 228) see globalization as representing 'the culminating phase of the process of commodification', one in which 'pricing standards have not only been stretched to encompass almost every region on the planet but also deepened to encompass every type of entity capable of being traded'. Economic conditions of increased competitiveness and inequality increase the likelihood of commodification, as individuals seek 'biographical solutions to systemic contradictions' (Beck 1992: 137, in Bauman 2000: 34). Speaking English with the right accent becomes part of a package of personal attributes that increases perceived competitiveness in certain marketplaces; as access to English education increases, the differentiation and stratification of the entity 'English' increases too. As more people speak English, the 'profit of distinction' (Bourdieu 1990: 139) that comes from its possession declines, encouraging ever more complex kinds of differentiation and specialization.

The consumption of commodified forms of accent may be a minority pursuit, however, one that is restricted to specialized markets. As an antidote to the idea that globalization might lead to the homogenization of accents, Blommaert (2010: 59) usefully notes that 'most people in the world do *not* want to learn American accents … most people couldn't care less'. Considering the realities of acquisition, it may not be the American accent that is actually learned. Instead, accent reduction seems to represent not so much 'moulding' as 'smoothing', the flattening or effacing of deviation that Crary (2013: 56) sees as being characteristic of globalization. People are not necessarily trying to gain American accents, but they are trying to lose (or reduce) the accent features that mark them out as being too different. Crary (2013: 56) further observes that

> [a] generalized sameness is inevitably one result of the global scale of the markets in question, and their dependence on the consistent or predictable actions of large populations. It is attained *not* by the making of similar individuals, as theories of mass society used to assert, but through the reduction or elimination of differences, by narrowing the range of behaviours that can function effectively in most contemporary institutional contexts.

Again, as in the 'accent school' story presented in Chapter 1, it may not matter whether the accent is actually American, British or whatever. The locality of market

conditions means that when it comes to getting a job it may simply be comparative, rather than absolute advantage that counts – sounding less Hong Kong than your competitor. 'High' and 'low' are indeed still important considerations, and they not only involve simplistic local/global or internal/external (e.g. Hong Kong/ American) oppositions – there is a local ideology of distinction and hierarchy, which is mapped onto the continuum of local accent features.

Accent commodification illustrates the role of indexicality in establishing and maintaining the value of linguistic commodities. Drawing on the enregisterment model of Agha (2005, 2007), Park and Wee (2012: 127) explain how general processes of commodification arise from the linkage of a commodity with socially recognizable situations and users, for example in advertising. These are part of 'everyday discursive practices', according to Park and Wee (2012: 127), who thus link enregisterment to the practice-based view of language introduced earlier in this chapter. Over time, if advertising and other aspects of 'commodity formulation' (Agha 2007) are successful, the circulation of images and associations gives the commodity desirable attributes within a complex indexical field (Park and Wee 2012: 127). This may include multiple aspects and connotations, so that what is being sold becomes a 'package' of desirable attributes. Blommaert (2009: 257) points out that the promotional discourse of the accent reduction industry includes indexical representations of 'America', of what it is and what it has to offer its speakers, along with the linguistic aspects of 'American accent'.

This is also demonstrated by the video accompanying the 'accent school' story presented in Chapter 1: the proprietor is shown next to a display case containing 'American Eagle' statuettes. As indicated by Silverstein's concept of consubstantiality, the implicit promise of such discourse is that to partake in the American accent is not only to sound like an American, but to partially *become* one by doing so.

Claiming the space: two approaches to global English

The key concepts listed above help to identify some of the important characteristics of global English, as it is defined here. To conclude this chapter, and to orient it towards the pedagogical focus of later chapters, it is worth looking at how two research paradigms have conceptualized global English and developed pedagogical responses. These paradigms are World Englishes (henceforth, WE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). They are important for this study because they have particular indications for matters of accent and pronunciation, including the ways in which pronunciation is taught and tested. The assumptions and motivations of these paradigms can also be elucidated using the sociolinguistic toolkit introduced above. Criticisms of both WE and ELF have multiplied in recent years (e.g. for the former, Bruthiaux 2003 and Saraceni 2010; for the latter, O'Regan 2014 and Park and Wee 2012). I wish to avoid going over familiar ground, and in later chapters I will focus in more detail on the accent-related and pedagogical aspects of WE and ELF proposals. What follows here is a brief introduction to the two research paradigms, with reference to the concepts introduced above.

World Englishes

The World Englishes approach to global English focuses on the development of what are seen as distinctive varieties of English, largely following nation-state boundaries. The main focus of WE has been on postcolonial contexts, where the dynamic model of Schneider (2003) is often employed to understand how new varieties emerge, and what their stage of development is. Variety emergence is linked with an emerging sense of collective identity in the communities concerned. A certain amount of linguistic consistency and societal cohesiveness is therefore assumed.

Under conditions of globalization, the 'Herderian triad' of 'community-language-place' starts to look highly outdated (Canagarajah 2013). Concepts such as scales and polycentricity undermine the notions of internal unity and cohesiveness. They suggest that nation-states are more likely to be divided by English than united by it. World Englishes research makes frequent recourse to so-called 'endonormative' (internal) versus 'exonormative' (external) evaluative orientations (e.g. Schneider 2011), but this is called into question by the vertical stratification of use and meaning emphasized by a scalar approach. Simultaneity and polycentricity suggest that people orient towards different 'centres' at the same time, and on different occasions. Some may be more local than others, but the diversity and stratification of the 'local' is foregrounded. Instead of postcolonial 'varieties' based on collective identity, as in Schneider's approach, what appears to make more sense is the existence of 'multiple identities within a single subject' (Englund 2004: 14, in Arnaut 2012: 5).

The WE approach to local varieties of English can be seen as a parallel of early efforts 'to frame a postcolonial theory', efforts which

> relied too heavily on a strategy of inversion of values in which a variety of dichotomous structures observed in the relations between (post)-colonized cultures and the metropolitan center – margin/center, order/disorder, reality/unreality, power/impotence, authentic/inauthentic, being/nothingness, and so forth – were now reversed in such a way that those values conventionally assigned to the colonized community were now privileged, held to organize and legitimate postcolonial cultural production.
>
> (Pandit and McGuire 1995: 6)

As Pandit and McGuire go on to explain, this seemingly radical gesture depends on 'overdetermined, highly inflexible, and least partly discredited categories that fail to address the complex, pluralistic energies of postcolonial experience'(1995: 6). In sociolinguistics, Parkin (2012) characterizes the shift in orientations away from 'classificatory' approaches based on the description of distinct and bounded entities. The identification of local varieties imposes

> a classificatory grid which is ideological insofar as it is based on a perception and claim which may depart from the fact that the variety is not really that neatly distinctive of others and in some respects overlaps with them.
>
> (Parkin 2012: 74)

Again, these are familiar criticisms of WE. 'Distinctive' features can usually be found in other varieties, and often they are not widely distributed across the population of users. Thus it is that linguists 'spend pages and chapters describing variation and explaining that not all group members use the linguistic features they have described as comprising the variety' (Benor 2010: 159). The description of varieties involves largely intractable decisions about what (and therefore who) to include or exclude, and is therefore, as Parkin rightly observes, ideological. As Cameron (1995: 6) puts it, the notion of linguistic rules as 'descriptive' and 'natural', rather than normative like any other social activity, is either 'disingenuous or a category mistake'.

The critique of 'varieties' develops from the critique of 'languages' as bounded entities (e.g. Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Jorgensen *et al.* 2011). But in WE discourse, codification, or the selection of distinctive features for inclusion in an 'emerging' local variety, is a recurring theme:

> Basically, forms and features which are used regularly by educated speakers of local English should ultimately qualify and be accepted as elements of a new, emerging standard variety. To successfully implement such a policy, codification will be required – the systematic and empirical analysis and description of educated indigenous forms of English in dictionaries and grammars.
>
> (Schneider 2011: 219)

The identification of 'educated speakers' is not only ideological, however; it is highly problematic in a practical sense. Parakrama (1995: 185), writing of the postcolonial context of Sri Lanka, notes the illusion of consensus involved in codification proposals: 'competent users must be able to make judgments about "defensible standards and good examples" … yet competent users cannot agree about such standards and examples'. In these attempts to codify local varieties, standardization is assumed to represent the 'culmination of community acceptance over time' (Parakrama 1995: 46). The alternative view, that language represents a 'site of struggle', appears 'heretical' within conventional linguistics (Parakrama 1995: 46).

In contemplating attempts to describe and codify 'new varieties' we gain a clearer understanding of how these activities are always highly ideological. There is a sense of history repeating itself as we realize that their 'norm-presuming values' resemble 'regimes of standardization of European languages … in particular politicoeconomic orders' (Silverstein 1998: 406). In an insightful analysis, Saraceni (2010: 76) notes the irony of pluralists being forced to take up the tools of nationalist linguistics. We therefore have to assume that attempts to codify varieties involve a certain amount of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1987) – it is known that there are actually few unifying or 'essential' features, but the appearance of unity is needed to advance a non-linguistic agenda of self-determination and autonomy (Bucholtz 2003: 401). I will return to the questions of strategic essentialism and codification in more detail in Chapter 6, but for now

it is sufficient to note that 'description' has two facets, as noted by Seargeant and Tagg (2011). First there is 'word to world fit', the degree to which description appears to capture the phenomena in question. This is what sociolinguists are usually interested in, according to Seargeant and Tagg (2011: 499). Second, there is 'world to word fit', or the extent to which description may have real-world effects. This is the usual goal of language planners, because they have non-linguistic goals such as the creation of national identity, or the marginalization or assimilation of ethnic groups.

The WE approach therefore involves the uneasy coexistence of the two functions of 'description'. To employ another of the concepts introduced above, WE codification represents an attempt to *enregister* forms that may exist below the level of community awareness, changing the ideological terrain and the indexical potentials of these forms. Speakers of local varieties will no longer have to accept 'native speaker norms'; they can point to the dictionary and 'challenge a native speaker's opinion' (Cummings and Wolf 2011: p. xviii). The linguistic-anthropological view reminds us of the inseparability of language and ideology, and the above criticisms of WE are not therefore intended to suggest that there is anything inherently wrong with such language-ideological activity. The more pertinent questions include whether this activity is likely to work, and how it translates into teaching and testing activities; these questions are also taken up in more detail in Chapter 6.

For now, I would like to avoid giving the impression that WE has nothing to offer because of the problems outlined above. The complexities of global English make it inevitable that there will be tensions and paradoxes in any analytical approach. This does not invalidate the approach; the identification of recurring 'local' features is a valuable activity, as long as the temptation to reify a variety is avoided, and I will draw on descriptions of Hong Kong English accents in making suggestions for pronunciation teaching later in this book.

English as a Lingua Franca

Similar criticism could be, and has been, applied to the research paradigm of English as a Lingua Franca. ELF is of particular relevance here because it has produced concrete proposals for pronunciation teaching (e.g. Jenkins 2000). As in WE, ELF involves linguistic descriptions and pedagogical proposals that rest on particular assumptions about the nature of global English, and reflect activist commitments towards it. The central claim of ELF research is that, under conditions of globalization, English is no longer being used primarily as a 'native language', but as a lingua franca between speakers from different backgrounds. ELF is defined by Seidlhofer (2011: 7) as 'any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option'. This definition allows native speakers to be included in ELF interactions, if only when their interlocutors are non-native speakers. Interactions between native speakers are therefore excluded by the definition.

Leaving aside the problematic native/non-native dichotomy for the time being, it first appears that the need for a 'variety', and its association with a 'territory' or 'community', is less of a stumbling block for ELF than it is for WE. In recent years ELF research has moved away from a preoccupation with identifying ELF forms and codifying them, although the possibility of codification has not been entirely abandoned (Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 287). The research focus has shifted towards identifying the processes and strategies that are seen to underlie lingua franca communication (Cogo and Dewey 2012). In other words, ELF research has moved away from viewing ELF as a 'system' and towards a more 'emergent' viewpoint. In doing so it has started to incorporate insights from theories of dynamic systems and complexity (e.g. Baird *et al.* 2014), potentially leading to a more nuanced view of 'system'.

Seen in this light, ELF research ought to be more capable of capturing the deterritorialized, emergent aspects of global English. However, if the 'local variety' concept is a stumbling block for WE, there are similar issues of boundary-drawing in ELF. The problem has been described (e.g. by Mortensen 2013) as one of *reification:* the tendency to create a 'thing', an object that is bounded and therefore distinct from other objects, 'graspable' in some way. The concept 'ELF' can only attain visibility if there is a 'non-ELF' to compare it with; in many accounts the shadow takes the equally reified form of 'ENL' (English as a Native Language; e.g. Seidlhofer 2011). This is perhaps the central paradox of WE and ELF. Both linguistic descriptivism and sociolinguistic activism require distinctive and separate objects, but the complexities of globalization and an enhanced awareness of language ideology make the coherence of such objects hard to substantiate. It makes little difference whether 'ELF' is seen as distinctive in terms of its linguistic features, or in terms of its interactional processes and strategies (Mortensen 2013: 30); the inevitable outcome is reification, and the need to draw boundaries around the resultant object.

What is it that is claimed to make the construct of ELF distinctive? According to Firth, 'what transcends ELF interactions is an inherent variability, both interactionally – as a form of social action – and in terms of linguistic "form"' (Firth 2009: 162). The 'inherent variability' of communication cannot be denied, but ELF researchers apparently believe that non-ELF interactions – presumably those taking place between native speakers – do *not* involve variability. However, once we adopt the kind of viewpoint suggested by the conceptual toolkit outlined above, we realise that what characterises *all* social interactions is an 'inherent variability'. Undermining the concept of languages as bounded entities also challenges the idea that any two speakers use 'the same' language' to communicate 'the same' ideas. Even in 'native speaker' settings, the more we have to communicate across boundaries of social class, age, regional affiliation and so on, the more we come to realize that such characterizations of 'ELF' are in fact descriptions of communication *in general*. The picture that emerges from the complexity is not so much one of English *as* a lingua franca, but rather that English *is* a lingua franca.

ELF discourse often depends on what Pratt (1991) called the 'linguistics of community', as can be seen from the frequent references to features that are

shared by 'ELF users' (e.g. Kirkpatrick 2010). In the era of globalization, the preoccupation with shared features and identifiable 'users' seems to belong to a 'sociolinguistics of nostalgia' (Bucholtz 2003). But in global English debates, such as that concerning pronunciation models, the rhetorical need for a distinctive category – ELF as opposed to non-ELF, or ENL – remains. Although Seidlhofer (2009: 242) rightly observes that the study of ELF encourages us to 'raise questions about the denomination "Englishes" and "World Englishes", i.e. as countable (proper) nouns implying separate bounded entities', these entities appear prominently in her 2011 work:

> English as a lingua franca should by now have got established as an autonomous concept next to (rather than subordinate to) ENL [English as a Native Language] norms.

(Seidlhofer 2011: 38)

Similarly, for Cogo and Dewey (2012: 16) ELF is 'a fully complex language system, just like ENL'. Again, and as in WE, the reluctance to abandon the 'language as entity' view has to be seen as a manifestation of strategic essentialism. Notions of system – or at least of boundaries – and of the 'shared' aspects of communication are crucial to the activist goals of ELF. Boundaries between types of language use and language users allow for the creation of identities, the recognition of difference and the preparation of the ideological terrain for debate. They also enable the discursive construction of an indexical field, one in which ELF is associated with desirable polarities such as 'contemporary' and 'naturally occurring' (Cogo and Dewey 2012: 18). A certain amount of reification is therefore needed. Viewing language as a dynamic range of practices, an emergent collection of forms, or as multiple continua of variation may be more accurate in a descriptive sense, but it is less persuasive than presenting 'ELF' as an alternative to 'ENL'. The rules of enregisterment have been set by established varieties, and activists seem to have little choice but to follow suit.

Once again, these paradoxes do not negate the contributions of ELF research. The native/non-native opposition is increasingly difficult to maintain in its traditional form, but – and perhaps more to the point – the *concept* of the native speaker still has powerful ideological effects. The identities of language learners and language teachers are affected by discursive constructs such as 'native speaker' and its explicit or implicit counterpart, 'non-native speaker'. Categories and labels form an important part of the indexical material with which identities are constructed, in interaction and discourse. As with WE, it is unavoidable that categories such as 'ELF' should come to perform ideological work in global English debates, and that persuasion should accompany description. However, later in the book I will argue that the concept of 'native speaker English' or ENL is probably the wrong target of attempts to reform language teaching. The findings and general orientation of ELF research certainly merit attention, and later in the book I will draw upon them to help theorize intelligibility (Chapter 4) and evaluate 'lingua franca' approaches to pronunciation models (Chapter 5).

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3 Accent and pronunciation

The previous chapter outlined some of the phenomena of global English, and introduced concepts and approaches that are relevant to its study. This chapter explores the nature and relevance of accent and pronunciation in more detail. It begins by examining and attempting to disambiguate the concepts of 'accent' and 'pronunciation'. Various perspectives on 'accent' are taken, beginning with its evolutionary significance before moving on to sociolinguistic perspectives on accent and its relationship with identity. Complementing the sociolinguistic perspective, and contributing to the later formulation of pedagogical guidelines, accent-related research from the second language acquisition (SLA) tradition is also examined. The chapter thus involves a combination of sociolinguistic and linguistic perspectives on accent and pronunciation. The main orientational questions here are: what do we mean by 'accent', and what is particularly noteworthy about it in relation to global English? Which aspects of its origin, use and acquisition are relevant to the book's wider questions about teaching English pronunciation in a globalized world?

'Accent' and 'pronunciation'

Defining the terms 'accent' and 'pronunciation' is no easy task. There is considerable appeal in Lippi-Green's (1997: 42) characterization: accents are 'loose bundles of prosodic and segmental features distributed over geographical and/or social space'. 'Segmental' features are vowel and consonant sounds; 'prosodic' features, also called 'suprasegmental' features, refer to phenomena such as stress and intonation. The geographical and social dimensions of Lippi-Green's definition call to mind Blommaert's (2010) horizontal and vertical scales, introduced in Chapter 2, and establish the importance of accent in placing others – as well as ourselves – in this two-dimensional space.

It comes as something of a disappointment, then, to see that in a later edition of *English with an Accent*, Lippi-Green abandons the above definition in favour of an admission that linguists have 'struggled to find an accurate definition of the word *accent*, and for the most part, have given it up as a bad job' (Lippi-Green 2012: 45). This is because the perception of accent can only take place if there is something to compare it with (Lippi-Green 2012: 45). It only makes sense

to talk of a 'Southern' accent if there is a 'Northern', or at least non-southern, accent from which it can be distinguished. If we perceive that an accent has no particular significations it might be described as 'neutral', but there is still an accent: a speaker without an accent is like 'a day without weather', in Barth's (1988: 287) phrase. All speakers have accents, in the sense of using a particular 'bundle of features' as opposed to another bundle. The perception of accent 'neutrality' is otherwise known as the myth of non-accent (Lippi-Green 2012: 44). The *impression* of neutrality can be seen as a positive capability, achieved through the approximation of vowel qualities and so on; it is an indication of how well we have been able to adopt the norms of the groups we wish to identify with. It can also be seen as a negative capability, a sign of how diligently we have worked at losing our accent features, or at being able to disguise them (as suggested by the 'I want my accent back' story in Chapter 1).

Naturally, what passes for 'neutrality' is different in each locale and situation. The neutrality one has achieved or been socialized into for participation in mainstream social settings and workplaces will quickly become a liability if one has to move more widely. Again, we see the workings of language ideology. The existence of neutrality in any context reveals the hegemony of prevailing norms (Blommaert and Rampton 2011), regardless of whether these are seen as 'dominant' in a mainstream sense. The myth of 'neutral accent' can be understood if it is placed within the wider context of standard language ideology (Milroy and Milroy 1985), in which the standard becomes privileged and yet invisible. Barthes's (1973) insight into myths is useful here: 'bourgeois myth' renders invisible the very existence of the bourgeoisie, by obscuring 'particular political and economic intentions under a natural, quotidian appearance' (McFall 2004: 14).

Apart from these ideological factors, there are other reasons for the belief that some people don't have accents. A common perception of accent is that it is mere ornament, minor variation added after the 'building blocks' are in place. The etymology of 'accent' and its associations with 'emphasis' perhaps encourage this view. But this also tends to reinforce standard language ideology: associating accent with minor variation makes the standard invisible, by assuming that its 'building blocks' are somehow natural or inherent to the language. An understanding of the non-accent myth, and of standard language ideology, therefore needs to consider the sociohistorical construction of standards. The commodification of invisibility practised by the 'accent reduction' industry in the US takes place against a backdrop of standard language hegemony (Silverstein 1996). Within popular metalinguistic discourse, the midwestern accent has been seen as a neutral standard since the 1920s (Carnevale 2009: 74). One might wonder why a rural heartland, rather than a metropolitan area – as in the case of Received Pronunciation (RP) in Britain – came to provide the features of the American standard. Bonfiglio (2002: 4) explains it as being due to the sense that the eastern seaboard cities had been 'contaminated' by immigrants; hence Americans 'gravitated toward the pronunciation associated with a "purer" region of the country, and they did so in a largely non-conscious manner' (cited in Carnevale 2009: 74).

Trudgill (2002: 160) insists that 'Standard English' can be spoken with any accent, at least in the UK. This is true in principle, but accents are differentially evaluated in terms of their ability to achieve the *impression* of standardness, and its related indexicalities. Trudgill (ibid.) also points out that most Standard English speakers do not have 'broad' local accents with many regional features. Regardless of what the standard accent is perceived to be in any particular locale, discussion of deviations from it also reveals the influence of a generalized standard language ideology. It is worth noting that such discussion tends to rely on *written* rather than spoken language for its points of reference. Much of the terminology of accent features in both specialized and public discourse, such as /h/-*dropping*, consonant cluster *reduction*, and so on, suggests that familiarity with written language affects our perception of what we hear and how we categorize it.

I will return to the question of 'standardness' and its relationship with written language in Chapters 6 and 7. It is worth noting here that accent and pronunciation play an interesting role in creating indexical positions such as 'standardness'. Eckert (2008: 468) notes the general way in which hyperarticulated pronunciation – 'careful' pronunciation, bearing a close resemblance to written or 'dictionary' forms – has indexical associations with 'carefulness' as a character attribute, while hypoarticulation has connotations of laziness. This 'leakage' between the physical, embodied qualities of pronunciation and their indexical meanings is also noted by Zhang (2005, 2008) in studies of the Beijing accent of Mandarin Chinese. The accent feature known as rhotacization lends an 'r'-like sound to many word endings, and this helps to create an aural impression of 'smoothness'; according to one interviewee 'the sound flows smoothly, free of roughness and harshness' (Zhang 2008: 209). The interesting point is that this aural impression has gained indexical associations with a 'smooth' Beijing persona (Zhang 2008: 211). The example also shows how 'linguistic features and styles derive their meanings from their associations with social personae and identities' (Zhang 2008: 212), and how this process of indexical association is inherently ideological.

The working definition of accent adopted in this book retains the general idea of accents as 'loose bundles of features', while acknowledging the difficulties of description and the effects of labelling features; the ideological construction of accents has consequences, and it is necessary to acknowledge these. It is also vital to avoid overstating the coherence of these 'loose bundles' in research. For this reason I generally refer to Hong Kong English *accents*, in the plural, and will critically examine accounts of so-called 'native' and 'non-native' accents in discourses of global English. Adapting Lippi-Green's definition slightly, in this book I will employ 'suprasegmental' rather than 'prosodic' to refer to features such as stress, intonation and rhythm. 'Segmental' features pertain to vowels and consonants. The term 'paralinguistic' will then be reserved for variables such as volume and tempo/speech rate, where necessary; some definitions of accent (e.g. Moyer 2013) include volume.

The problem with linguistic definitions of accent based on features, however, is that they neglect the obvious fact that accents are embodied. They can be described in linguistic terms, but they can only be performed in physical terms as

part of an overall performance involving posture, articulatory settings, and other non-linguistic components. We have relatively little knowledge of the embodied dimension of accents, and lack the terminology to deal with it adequately. Accents are in fact far more than 'loose bundles of features'; they are ways of speaking and of being, as already noted in Chapter 1. Although we may have to make simplifying assumptions for analytical or pedagogical purposes, teaching approaches are also handicapped if they lack a performative dimension. The linguistic characterization of accent has significant limitations, but it is one we will have to make do with for the time being.

'Pronunciation', on the other hand, is usually defined more narrowly as the way particular sounds or words are pronounced; it is taken by Moyer (2013) to refer to the articulation of segmental features. The problem with a very narrow definition is that, in its pedagogical or descriptive sense, 'pronunciation' can also refer to suprasegmentals such as word stress and intonation. This book does not attempt to make a watertight distinction between accent and pronunciation. Accent tends to refer to more 'global' patterns, as in the sense of contrastable 'regional accents', while pronunciation often refers to particular aspects of these patterns, as in 'the speaker's pronunciation of this word was unusual'. This is why the term 'pronunciation' is normally used in pedagogical contexts.

We might, however, observe that there is an ideological aspect to the accent/ pronunciation distinction: the former implies that there is some stability and continuity, while the latter suggests that there are 'errors' in need of correction. Labelling becomes important, especially in global English debates. Referring to a particular 'accent' normally implies that it is widely recognizable, usable by others for navigation 'in social and geographic space', as in Lippi-Green's definition. In the terminology of Chapter 2, such accents may constitute recognizable indexical orders, ones that have been enregistered. The identification and labelling of 'new varieties' and their accents, as in WE research, can therefore be seen as a contribution to enregisterment processes, an attempt to alter indexicalities. It is significant that one of the proposed criteria for the emergence of a 'new variety' is in fact the existence of a 'standard and recognizable pattern of pronunciation handed down from one generation to another' (Butler 1997: 106). In other words, WE research tends to see 'accent' where others might see 'pronunciation'. Interestingly, the Hong Kong students interviewed in this study do seem to make a useful distinction between accent and pronunciation, and I will explore this in more detail in Chapter 6.

Accent and the evolutionary basis of language

If there is something missing from the characterization of 'accent' adopted so far, it is a sense of how it got there in the first place; we need to uncover its origins in order to understand its importance and its effects. Accent-related phenomena underline the necessity of adopting an evolutionary orientation towards language, what Joseph (2004: 33) calls an 'evolutionary sociolinguistics'. The everyday importance of accent hardly needs stating. Through its ability to create significant effects through small differences, accent demonstrates the inseparability of the

social and the linguistic. The difference between a voiceless alveolar fricative and a voiceless palato-alveolar fricative is physiologically minor, yet it was precisely this articulatory distinction that led to the violent deaths of the 'forty and two thousand' in the biblical story of the shibboleth. This is a striking example of normativity, introduced in Chapter 2 via Blommaert's concept of polycentricity. The Ephraimites' lack of polycentricity – their inability or refusal to adopt the norms of another centre or group – was what led to their deaths. First, as part of the chapter's exploration of accent, I will consider the evolutionary origins of this normativity.

Human beings came to dominate their environment by exploiting the power of group cooperation. Millennia of natural selection constitute a protracted 'social and psychological arms race' (Pagel 2012: 250), one that hasled humans to develop 'cultural survival vehicles' – protective layers of knowledge that develop around groups, and which can be shared with others and passed down through generations (Pagel 2012: 12–13). Language is one such layer of knowledge, crucial in that it facilitates the sharing and transmission of other layers such as shared identity. As it is so deeply imbricated in histories of cultural transmission, language did not merely evolve to enable us 'to communicate'. It is the audible and visible manifestation of a powerful instinct for survival, in Pagel's words 'a self-interested piece of social technology for enhancing the returns we get from cooperation inside the survival vehicles of our cultures' (Pagel 2012: 281). Language made it possible for early humans to increase group size without reducing cohesion (Joseph 2004: 27).

Even if we accept the breaking down of boundaries, and the problematization of 'groups' such as 'societies', 'cultures' and 'nation-states' under the effects of globalization, it is worth bearing in mind the influence of this evolutionary inheritance on language- and accent-related phenomena. While globalization and various forms of mediated communication have greatly increased the range of possible interactions over the past few hundred years, there are 160,000 to 200,000 years of small-group living behind us. As Pagel (2012: 191) observes, 'many of our dispositions are those we would expect of a species that has evolved to live for long periods of time around sets of people we might expect to see over and over'. Thus normativity persists, even under conditions of super-diversity:

> it is vital to remember just how far normativity (or 'ought-ness') reaches into semiosis and communication. For much of the time, most of the resources materialized in any communicative action are unnoticed and taken for granted, but it only takes a slight deviation from habitual and expected practice to send recipients into interpretive over-drive, wondering what's going on when a sound, a word, a grammatical pattern, a discourse move or bodily movement doesn't quite fit.
>
> (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 12)

Drawing on Dunbar's account of the origins of language, Joseph (2004: 27) explains that language has a dual role: it allows us to convey something about ourselves, but of necessity it enables us to 'read' things about others. Accent is something that is particularly 'readable'.

Normativity

Continuing from the brief discussion of normativity in Chapter 2, and refining the concept in order to inform subsequent considerations of phenomena such as language attitudes, we might here distinguish between two senses of normativity: performative and evaluative. Performative normativity is the ability to evaluate different options for communicative output. It involves comparing the likely effects of particular expressions or pronunciations in particular social situations, and selecting one for performance (this usually takes place without much conscious attention). Evaluative normativity is the ability, and the propensity, to evaluate input of various kinds. It relates semiotic cues to past experience, for example by 'reading' accent features and associating them with group characteristics or individual stances. Normativity is thus a dynamic process that relates past experiences to present situations, choosing between alternatives and evaluating their potential or actual effects. Our communicative outputs become other people's inputs, and the evaluative and performative dimensions operate seamlessly:

> [L]anguage is part of a broader, non-species-specific capacity for organizing, reading and interpreting sensory data in our environment, reacting to those interpretations, and affecting the environment with one's own grist for the interpretative mills of other beings.
>
> (Joseph 2004: 33)

Our sense of normativity has a psychological basis, and – as theorized by practice-based views of social activity – many of its operations take place at an unconscious level. Our evolutionary success has depended on us being able to make rapid use of data provided by the physical environment, and also by people in the social environment: their likely origins and characteristics, and their degree and kind of relatedness.

Language, and perhaps especially accent, does much of this interpretive work via the processes of evaluative normativity. In accent-related phenomena and in the findings of many studies of attitudes towards accents, we can see the operation of what Joseph (2004) calls 'over-reading'. We interpret much more than 'meaning' when a word is spoken:

> [W]e interpret much else from the precise way in which the word is said – mainly information about the speaker, including his or her background, intentions, credibility … we read an identity onto the people whose words we hear … [w]e can call this more precisely 'over-reading', since the data on which it is based is (nearly) always inadequate to support the references made.
>
> (Joseph 2004: 38)

In the course of human history varied means of expression would of course have been adaptive, as humans learned to navigate the geographical and social

spaces that opened up. But this navigation largely depended on group cooperation. Language and 'accent' thus became crucial means by which groups strengthened their internal cohesion and sense of identity, simultaneously distinguishing themselves from other groups. Sensitivity to accent became a way to detect 'outsiders' of various kinds, and the ability to reproduce accent acted as an advertisement of one's loyalty to the group.

Seen in this light, the impression of 'non-accent', of carefully judged 'neutrality', is actually an active demonstration of one's willingness to conform. As Bourdieu puts the point:

> The agent who 'regularizes' his situation or puts himself in the right is simply beating the group at its own game; in abiding by its rules, falling into line with good form, he wins the group over to his side by ostentatiously honouring the values the group honours.
>
> (Bourdieu 1977: 22)

Accent thus became part of the framework of normativity that serves to bind groups together. According to Pagel (2012: 82), accents, along with rituals, shared beliefs, customs and religious systems, are among the cues we 'instinctively and subconsciously use to assess our cultural relatedness to others'. Accent-related normativity is not only a force from above – it also proceeds from below, because it enables us to demonstrate our commitment to the group and its values. Silverstein's higher-order indexicality can be seen as a manifestation of this symbolic interaction; 'consubstantiality' suggests that by partaking in the accent features of the group, we appear to take on its qualities and may feel their presence at an embodied or emotional level.

We should not therefore be surprised if 'accent reduction' programmes and 'American accent' classes sell their wares by appealing to determinedly non-linguistic, and often frankly irrational, impulses (see Blommaert 2009). By understanding normativity in this broader sense, we can also better appreciate why language is seen as inherently ideological, from the linguistic-anthropological viewpoint outlined in Chapter 2. If we accept Dunbar's (1996) hypothesis about the origins of language, its fundamental function is not 'communicative' or 'representative'; it is political (Joseph 2004: 28; see also Dessalles 2000). Language co-evolved with humans, allowing them and requiring them to 'form social alliances in order to deal with challenges in their environment, including from particularly powerful individuals within their own species'. The 'groups' in our evolutionary history were not particularly stable, and both inter- and intra-group rivalry must have been intense. Language has always been a mode of resistance, of differentiation, as well as one of cohesion. It is inseparable from the operations of power, within and between groups. The 'implacable stickiness' of ideology, its 'unconscious' aspects mentioned by Barthes (1975: 29), also reflect its evolutionary histories.

Sociolinguistic perspectives: development and identity

Several aspects of the discussion so far suggest that identity must play a central role in the consideration of accent and pronunciation. For Joseph (2004: 39), identity and the reading of identity are 'the fundamental basis of human communication and interaction'. Building on the aspects of identity introduced in Chapter 2, this section will consider the relationship between accent and identity in more detail. It first considers accent development from a sociolinguistic perspective that focuses on the relationship between accent and identity. The section then takes a more linguistic perspective, using the term 'acquisition' and drawing upon research from the field of second language acquisition, or SLA. I will use the abbreviations 'L1' and 'L2' to distinguish between first and second language contexts, while recognizing that these terms may often be misleading in current contexts of language acquisition.

The evolutionary and psychological bases of normativity, as introduced above, indicate that children must be active processors of language and accent differences. Research evidence demonstrates the ways in which childhood language acquisition has a deeply social orientation. This is true at all levels of language, but again there are ways in which accent is particularly salient in marking intra-group and inter-group differences. Eckert (2000: 10) focuses on the development of L1 accents, pointing out that this complements a focus on mature users. She concludes that small children are stylistically active (Andersen 1990), and that they see language patterns as related to their own social possibilities. Some aspects of the local/global and standard/non-standard polarities may begin to manifest themselves in the family environment. According to Eckert (2000: 13), the sociolinguistic notions of 'vernacular' and 'standard' may emerge from distinctions the child notices between child and adult speech, and between affectionate and angry speech. By entering schooling systems the child is further exposed to the standard and the more 'global' norms it represents, associating it with authority via the presence of the teacher. Although children may not appear to have detailed knowledge of the standard, they may still be 'developing an awareness of the linguistic market and the relations between linguistic variation and power, quite early on' (Eckert 2000: 13).

We gain added insight into certain aspects of the local/global polarity at this point: it does not merely mean 'internal/external', as suggested by the WE terms of 'endonormative' and 'exonormative' language forms. Rather, it represents recursive power relations at the levels of family, school, and society. As in Blommaert's scalar view, 'local' spaces are highly stratified, and there may be disagreement as to what constitutes a norm. If, as is usually the case, there is awareness of the existence of a 'standard', this is not necessarily the same as being oriented towards a 'global' or external model. Orientations towards standard language are often related to local ideologies, and may also be visible in attitudes towards the first language.

Although Eckert is describing first-language settings, much the same thing applies to second or additional languages such as English if we take a sociocultural

perspective on its acquisition.[1] In some cases an awareness of the 'linguistic market' for English only develops later, after a certain level of proficiency has been reached. But whatever the level of English, accent differences are potentially available for indexical work: they place students in different categories, and students may exploit or resist categorization. Eckert's (2000) study focused on the differentiation of groups in secondary school, and on the role of accent features and other markers in associated processes of identity formation. According to Eckert, it is during adolescence that the relation between 'the local marketplace of identities, the school, and one's future potential in the adult market becomes clear' (Eckert 2000: 14). This situation also applies to second language (L2) English contexts, in which varieties and accents of English start to become associated with identity positions and future possibilities.

Accent and identity

Discussion of 'accent and identity' therefore offers another portal into the relationship between the local and the global. The concepts of scales, indexicality and polycentricity suggest that even as people orient themselves towards 'local interaction', they are simultaneously evoking or revoking a range of wider images and associations: micro/macro entities ranging from individuals to nation states, and temporary or enduring stances employing polarities such as 'traditional/ modern', 'relaxed/effortful' and so on. The indexical fields of language use are nothing if not complex and dynamic.

Block's (2007: 26) 'nutshell' portrayal summarizes conceptualizations of identity in the social sciences. There is a concern with avoiding the extremes of either structure or agency in terms of explanation; identity often involves ambivalence, as people may feel required to refashion their identities in ways that may not be of their own choosing. This was suggested by the 'I want my accent back' story in Chapter 1. Identity is thus shaped by large-scale economic, social and cultural processes, but at the same time individuals can shape and refashion their identities within these currents – depending on their ability to access various kinds of economic, social and cultural capital. Identity is therefore both individual and social. It involves both performance and evaluation. It can be 'achieved' by the speaker or 'ascribed' by the listener (Blommaert 2005), but it is 'neither contained solely within the individual nor does it depend exclusively on how others see the individual' (Block 2007: 26). It is signalled and recognized through non-verbal as well as verbal behaviour. Identity positionings can invoke or reject group membership or other affiliations, and can be oriented towards imagined, as well as actual, communities (Ryan and Irie 2014). Finally, identity moves can maintain existing relationships and identifications and create new ones; identity stands 'at the crossroads of past, present and future' (Block 2007: 26).

The concept of identity does a lot of work, and the relationship between accent and identity involves one complex, multilayered phenomenon meeting and constituting another. In Chapter 2 I mentioned Blommaert's observation in the context of scalar theory, namely that every social event 'develops simultaneously in

space and in time, often in multiply imagined spaces and time frames' (Blommaert 2007: 5). If we try to separate the two dimensions, we can see that identity can be related to large-scale categories such as nation-states or regions, and intermediate levels such as communities of practice (workplaces and social circles also shape identity). It is here that the notion of 'intersectionality' (Elder-Vass 2012: 113) becomes relevant, as people belong to multiple communities of all kinds – perhaps especially so under conditions of globalization. But intersectionality barely does justice to the complexity, because (as noted above) people also belong to or identify with imagined communities. This aspect of identity is particularly relevant to language learning, and here another component of Block's (2007) approach to identity can be noted: language identity refers to the relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication, such as languages, dialects or sociolects (Block 2007: 40). Pavlenko and Norton (2007: 670) note that 'the learning of another language, perhaps more than any other educational activity, reflects the desire of learners to expand their range of identities and to reach out to wider worlds' (in Ryan and Irie 2014: 109). Once again, we cannot attempt to confine learner identities within the boundaries suggested by traditional conceptions of the 'local'.

Identity therefore involves different spatial scales and temporal frames.[2] This can be further appreciated if we try to observe 'identity' in the temporal frame of interaction. In Chapter 2 I briefly mentioned the UK-based study of Altendorf (2003), which focuses on the use of accent features from 'Estuary English'. In line with the approach to Hong Kong English accents taken in this book, Estuary English is characterized as a continuum with both social and regional dimensions (Altendorf 2003: 134–5). Speakers were found to employ Estuary English accent features for various 'acts of identity'. In Le Page's original formulation, acts of identity involve orienting 'to the group with which at the moment we wish to identify' (Le Page 1986: 23, in Altendorf 2003: 151). The acts of identity approach thus has spatial and temporal elements within it. Even in the here-and-now of interaction, we can observe the effects of large-scale and durable structures such as nation-states and regional affiliations, interwoven with 'temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 592).

Altendorf's accent study can be used to illustrate these multiple and overlapping effects. I will use the term 'stance' here to refer to more temporary, interactionally specific orientations; 'ideals' refer to orientations towards more durable, abstract concepts, as in Blommaert's (2010) schema, and 'styles' are repertoires of features associated with personae or identities, again tending to persist over longer time frames (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 597). The identity position of 'selected naughtiness' might be classed as a temporary stance occurring within an overall informal style; it involves using certain kinds of T glottalling (e.g. pronouncing the medial /t/ of *bottle* as a glottal stop), among other features. For middle-class speakers, it has the situational effect of signalling affiliation with the 'unprivileged', but it has to be used carefully; as Altendorf (2003: 154) explains, 'it is still too "naughty" in more formal styles where it might give the impression that "one does

not know better"'. Acts of identity are skilled balancing acts. Altendorf (2003: 151) provides two general principles that explain accent variation in her study: the first principle is that speakers want to 'hold the balance between '"roughness" and "sophistication", between stigma and prestige' (Fabricius 2000: 145, in Altendorf 2003: 151). The second is that younger speakers 'want to distance themselves from a whole array of older-generation speakers, including the old-fashioned "elitist", the old-fashioned "common" and the old-fashioned "middle-classish"' (Altendorf 2003: 152).

This suggests the inherent dynamism of polycentric identity; as soon as a centre forms, it becomes a focus for alternative, reactive identities. Acts of identity are as much about distancing as approaching. This is also revealed by the nature of more durable ideals and styles. Although Altendorf does not use the term, the former category can be seen to include 'not sounding common', by avoiding basilectal variants, and 'preserving social distinction' through the selective use of T glottalling (Altendorf 2003: 152–4). Speakers maintain class distinctions by using the glottal variant in certain phonological contexts; this conveys the indexicalities of being 'modern' and 'daring'. They avoid using it in other contexts, where it might be more noticeable, in order to avoid sounding 'common' or 'uneducated' (Altendorf 2003: 153). Styles include 'relaxed style', in which Yod Coalescence (pronouncing the start of *education* as [edʒ] rather than [edj]) conveys an impression of 'informality and nonchalance' (Altendorf 2003: 154).

Altendorf's study therefore shows how the 'here and now' of interaction is in fact shaped by identity processes that occur across various spatial scales and temporal frames. The spatial scales involved are relatively 'local', as the groups that are invoked or rejected are within the actually experienced, media-depicted or imagined communities of those involved. The study of Besnier (2004) took place in Tonga, and identifies acts of identity with a wider spatial scale; Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 599) note that the study addresses the important question of 'how large-scale social processes such as globalization shape identity in interaction'. The speaker in Besnier's study, a female market trader, uses centralized, 'New Zealand-style' vowels in order to align with the indexical pole of 'modernity'. To perform identity work, the vowels do not have to be exactly like those of New Zealanders. As Bucholtz and Hall observe in their commentary, even a 'linguistically slight similarity to the transnational prestige variety of English is sufficient' – as in the case of the 'accent school' story in Chapter 1, where 'Britishness' appeared to be a relative concept.

To illustrate how identity is constructed in interaction, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) identify five principles. First, the principle of *emergence* reminds us of the practice-based view introduced in Chapter 2, and emphasizes that identity is the emergent product, rather than the pre-existing source, of linguistic and semiotic practices (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 588). Second, the principle of *positionality* captures the 'simultaneity' noted above: 'identity' can encompass a range of spatial scales and temporal dimensions, even within a single interaction (this recalls Blommaert's concept of polycentricity). Thus it is that the 'local' is not merely about smallness and proximity (Pennycook 2010: 54). Acts of identity can

be temporary or more enduring; there are specific 'cultural positions' that tend to persist over time and between interactions, including styles such as 'African American youth style' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 591). Third, the principle of *indexicality* identifies the mechanism through which speakers and listeners relate linguistic forms to social meanings (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 594), as outlined in Chapter 2.

The fourth principle, *relationality*, acknowledges that identity is constructed from overlapping, complementary 'relations': similarity/difference, genuineness/ artifice and authority/delegitimacy; in the section on indexicality in Chapter 2, I used the term 'polarities' to describe these 'complementary oppositions'. Of these, similarity/difference is perhaps the most familiar. In Altendorf's study, speakers position themselves as being similar to certain images of groups – the 'young', the 'cool' and so on – and therefore different from other groups. Inclusion is partly achieved through exclusion. Bucholtz and Hall's approach to similarity/difference elaborates this relationship through the concepts of *adequation* and *distinction*. Adequation is about emphasizing similarity and inclusion:

> [D]ifferences irrelevant or damaging to ongoing efforts to adequate two people or groups will be downplayed, and similarities viewed as salient to and supportive of the immediate project of identity work will be foregrounded.
>
> (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 599)

Distinction, on the other hand, refers to what is excluded by these 'acts of inclusion'. Thus the Tongan market seller in Besnier's study achieves 'adequation with modern English-speaking cosmopolitanism' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 600) by using centralized, 'New Zealand-style' vowels. This simultaneously and unavoidably involves 'distinction from being an underclass "Islander," whose vowels are never centralized' (Besnier 2004: 32, cited in Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 601). The example also demonstrates that it is accent *features* – not merely generalized accent categories – that can be seen as performing indexical work in acts of identity.

Along with adequation and distinction there are other relations contained within the principle of relationality, in Bucholtz and Hall's schema. The most relevant here is the paired relation of authentication/denaturalization, which refers to whether language use is perceived as being 'authentic' or 'genuine' in a particular context. Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 601) usefully observe that what counts is the perceptions of language users, rather than those of analysts. This principle also relates to the 'accent school' story in Chapter 1, where local speakers appear to lay claim to 'British English': it is of little consequence whether analysts can find features of British English in their accents, because what counts is whether they are *perceived* to have aspects of 'Britishness' in the local context of interaction. In fact, the whole concept of 'Britishness' is dependent on perception, and may be remade in the local context.

Finally, Bucholtz and Hall's fifth principle, that of *partialness*, addresses the fact that both individual (or more agentic) and institutional (or more structural)

influences are involved in identity. Identity is 'inherently relational', and so it is always 'partial, produced through contextually situated and ideologically informed configurations of self and other' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 605). This principle further explains why ideology is seen as central to the processes of indexicality involved in communication. We cannot know the actual extent and nature of the groups that our 'acts of identity' invoke or reject, so our view of them is partial, and necessarily 'ideologically informed'. The principle of partialness also applies to analysts' accounts of interaction, as it is impossible to ascertain which indexicalities are being summoned in particular communicative acts. Nevertheless, it is possible to return to the agency/structure problematic introduced in Chapter 2, and gain some insight from the perspective of interaction. As Bucholtz and Hall explain this point:

> On the one hand, it is only through discursive interaction that large-scale social structures come into being; on the other hand, even the most mundane of everyday conversations are impinged upon by ideological and material constructs that produce relations of power. Thus both structure and agency are intertwined as components of micro as well as macro articulations of identity.

> (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 607)

This acknowledgement of macro-level structures provides a useful counterbalance to an excessively 'agentic' perspective on acts of identity. Because of the existence of normative forces arising from actual or imagined groups, there may be situations in which there is very little freedom, and perhaps only *one* linguistic choice that a speaker is likely to think of as being appropriate (Elder-Vass 2010: 110). Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's formulation of acts of identity is criticized by Elder-Vass (2010: 110) for its 'radical subjectivism' – again, if we theorize language as being the result of sedimented acts of identity (e.g. Pennycook 2007), we need to acknowledge the multiple constraints that exist.

In the next chapter I will argue that in addition to acts of identity, there are also 'acts of intelligibility' which influence the nature of communicative interaction. But before leaving the topic of identity, there is an additional constraint on the scope for 'acts of identity' that needs to be considered. If we take an L2 perspective and focus on the temporal frame of learning (specifically, language learning), rather than interaction, we realize that there are linguistic constraints, such as the ease with which accent features can be added to speakers' repertoires. The result of these constraints is that people may wish to adopt certain identity positions or roles, but be unable to because they cannot make effective use of the accent features required. The above formulations of identity suggest that there are several possible responses to this: acquiring the features or developing the ability to passably imitate them, perhaps making creative use of existing resources; rejecting these identity positions and adopting alternative ones; or employing strategies such as the interactional 're-framing' studied by Canagarajah (2013). Regardless of which is taken, in L2 contexts some awareness of accent acquisition

is needed. Acquisitional processes are relevant in determining which features enter the pool or continuum of available accent features, and how they are distributed. The next section will outline some of the typical patterns and constraints that arise when learning a second or additional language.

Linguistic perspectives: accent acquisition in L2 contexts

The sociolinguistic perspectives above enable us to see how accent, whether in a first, second or additional language, forms an important part of social processes and formations, beginning in childhood and continuing through our adult lives. This also applies to L2 or additional language acquisition. As is argued throughout this book, language teaching cannot assume that L2 learners are unaffected by questions of identity. In addition, in L2 contexts another dimension to 'accent' is required: this is provided by the temporal frame of language learning, and the question of how L2 English accents are acquired in terms of their features. Research findings from the second language acquisition (SLA) field help to address this question, and allow us to identify some of the specific accent features upon which to focus. This also provides a bridge to the pedagogical questions that are raised in later chapters.

Extensive studies of L2 accent development have taken place within the SLA research paradigm. The findings of such research are often viewed ambivalently by those taking a more sociolinguistically based WE or ELF perspective, partly because of the tendency for SLA to focus on nativelike 'target language' (see Firth and Wagner 1997) and its relative neglect of contexts of acquisition. Concepts such as interlanguage – in Selinker's (1972: 223) definition 'the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a TL [target language] norm' – are something of an anathema for those concerned with the legitimization of non-native variation. But the findings of such research cannot be ignored, and many SLA researchers do show awareness of variation in the way that more sociocultural approaches take for granted. Major (2001: 27) comes close to the sociocultural position when he states that 'everyone speaks an interlanguage'; in other words, there is no fixed target or point of arrival in language learning, even for so-called monolinguals.

One of the important points that has emerged so far is that in researching accents, it is vital to move beyond abstract notions of accent *types*: native/non-native, standard/non-standard, British/American/Hong Kong, and so on. An SLA perspective is useful in gaining a more detailed and dynamic consideration of accent *features* and their distribution within or across these abstract accent categories. If we examine studies of L2 accent development, two main themes emerge: the role played by *transfer* from the L1 on the one hand, and the influence of non-L1-related *developmental* or *universal* factors on the other. Transfer means that sounds or patterns from the L1 affect pronunciation in the L2. For example, Mandarin Chinese-speaking learners of English show a tendency to insert a schwa [ə] after final plosive consonants, in a process called epenthesis or schwa paragoge; thus *egg* becomes [egə]. From a transfer perspective this is because Mandarin

Chinese does not have words ending with plosives, and the /g/ is transformed into an extra syllable. Cantonese speakers, on the other hand, do not show this feature. Their L1 has plosives in final position, but they are voiceless and unreleased; if these features are transferred to English, *egg* may be pronounced more like [ek̚]). Many more examples could be given, but the L1 can be seen as influencing the L2 accent via the transfer of sounds from the L1, the avoidance of sounds in the L2 or a general orientation towards the phonological 'shape' of L2 words.

I hasten to emphasize that these features are not shown by all speakers of the L1 in question, and in fact one of the advantages of an SLA approach is that it indicates which accent features are associated with different stages of learning. However, the very concept of 'L1 transfer' has connotations of automatism that tend to make it unpopular. It also suggests negative influence, whereas current pedagogical approaches acknowledge both the inevitability and the benefits of certain kinds of transfer (Moyer 2004; Walker 2010). In line with the retreat from 'bounded entities' sketched in Chapter 2, it is now generally thought that trying to keep the learners' languages separate belongs to an outdated view of language teaching, and of language learning. The notion of 'transfer' resembles traditional approaches to 'code-switching' in that it also proceeds from the concept of languages as separate systems. In any case, the concept of 'transfer' becomes problematic on closer inspection. It is often difficult to decide what it is that is transferred, and whether what has been transferred is 'the same' as in the L1, somewhere in between the L1 and the L2, or somewhere else entirely. Illustrating the kind of hybridity that occurs, work by Flege (e.g. Flege *et al.* 1995) has shown that minute but characteristic differences persist in the pronunciation of L2 speakers even after long acquaintance with the second language.

There is no need to dispense with the concept entirely, however. Generally, and following Weinreich (1953) we can see that there are several possibilities as to the 'what' of transfer, including:

- Sounds: an equivalent or near-equivalent from the L1 is substituted for an L2 sound, as when Japanese speakers use [s] instead of /θ/ in words like *thank*, or English speakers of French use a back [uː] vowel instead of a front [y] vowel in words like *tu*.
- Processes: a phonological process from the L1 is transferred to the L2. Hence L1 English speakers learning French tend to pronounce a dark or velarized [ɫ] at the end of words like *elle* (Major 2008: 67) instead of a clear [l].
- Phonotactics: the syllable structure of the L1 affects the pronunciation of L2 syllables. This can be seen in both loanword phonology and in L2 English accents. *McDonalds* has three syllables in most English accents, but six in Japanese loan phonology because of the dominance of CV (consonant-vowel) syllable structure in Japanese.
- Prosody: intonational patterns may be transferred from the L1 to the L2, as when L1 English speakers of Mandarin Chinese end utterances on a falling tone, regardless of the actual tone of the final syllable.

As to the 'why' of transfer – why some L1 features are more likely to be transferred than others, and why some L2 features are easier to acquire than others – many explanations refer to *markedness* in one form or another. Again, markedness has 'universal' connotations; in the sense employed by Greenberg (1976), markedness is determined with reference to cross-linguistic comparisons. Unmarked features are more 'natural' or 'common' in the world's languages (Eckman 2008: 97). There are indeed some interesting cross-linguistic universals, such as the one relating to voiced/voiceless contrasts noted by Eckman (2008: 97): if a language has a voiced/voiceless contrast in final position (e.g. *bag/back*), it will also have such a contrast in initial position (*girl/curl*), but the reverse case does not hold. In other words, voiced/voiceless contrasts in final position are relatively more marked, less 'natural' than those in initial position. These 'implicational universals' may be of some use in predicting typical orders of acquisition. They partly explain the widespread tendency for learners of English to simplify final consonant clusters, with longer and more marked clusters being pronounced as shorter and less marked sequences (Hansen 2001: 339).[3]

As well as these universals, other indicators of markedness, such as stages of development in childhood L1 acquisition, may also be useful in predicting difficulties and orders of acquisition in L2 learning. But as many commentators have noted, the concept of markedness is difficult to employ in a systematic manner because of the difficulty of adequately defining it. It is also difficult to separate transfer effects from universal factors (Moyer 2004: 27). Several models of L2 accent acquisition concur in believing that transfer is more likely to occur at early stages of language learning. For example, the model presented by Hansen (2006) depicts a four-stage developmental sequence constrained by L1 transfer effects, developmental effects and markedness (Hansen 2006: 153). At the first stage, users make equivalence classifications, and consonants that are similar in type and position are transferred. Thus Cantonese does not possess close equivalents of the English /v/ sound, and something resembling a [w] may be used as a substitution. At the second stage of development, consonants are typically modified towards the emerging L2 repertoire, while transfer is still a constraint. At stage 3, transfer effects decrease and more marked consonants begin to emerge, but developmental and markedness effects continue to affect some sounds. Stage 4 of Hansen's sequence is characterized by 'the approximation of a native speaker-like phonology' (Hansen 2006: 155). This model does not preclude the influence of sociolinguistic factors such as identity, but it tends not to foreground them; the model of accent variation presented in Chapter 5 of this book makes their role more explicit.

We need to acknowledge the problematic nature of terms such as 'native-like' here, and bear in mind that these models are mainly based on 'traditional' or ESL contexts of acquisition. Nevertheless, the association of transfer effects with early stages of learning is also shown in other models, such as Major's (2001) Ontogeny Phylogeny Model. This characterizes acquisition as involving the avoidance of marked features. It posits that transfer effects predominate in early stages and then decrease, with developmental or universal constraints explaining later stages. If transfer and development are both implicated, as in the case of the notoriously

'difficult' dental fricative or TH sounds – easy to substitute, marked and hard to acquire – substitutions and other modifications may persist.

Building on earlier work by Gatbonton (1978), Trofimovich *et al.* (2007) show how the production of the voiced dental fricative /ð/ in different phonological contexts varied according to an implicational pattern. This approach avoids making a distinction between transfer and development, and instead makes inferences about stages of learning based on patterns of variation across a sample of speakers. Trofimovich *et al.*'s data showed that if a speaker was able to pronounce the voiced TH sound after a voiceless stop (as in *at the*), he or she was also able to produce it in the other seven contexts investigated: presence in one context implied presence elsewhere. Similarly, if a speaker was unable to pronounce the voiced dental fricative in word-initial position (as in *that*), they were usually unable to pronounce it in all other contexts: absence implied absence. These 'implicational' patterns in the data suggest that in the 'language learning' temporal frame, word-initial position is a relatively 'easy' context for this sound in terms of developmental sequences. The post-voiceless stop context (*at the*) is relatively more 'difficult', and is acquired later.

Jenkins (2000: 109) concludes, from her review of the literature, that substitutions which are predicted by both developmental and transfer processes 'tend to remain in interlanguage the longest, sometimes as permanent fixtures'. We might say that they persist beyond the temporal frame of learning, and form material for the emergence of more stable norms in the wider population. This kind of knowledge assists pronunciation teaching and testing by identifying accent features that are resistant to change; it may be the case that it is not worth spending time trying to 'correct' them. In the dynamic model of accent variation presented in Chapter 5, I will also argue that some of these features are 'resistant to change' because they do not affect *intelligibility*, or the ability of speakers to make themselves understood.

Finally, another observation that can be made on the subject of orders of acquisition is somewhat counter-intuitive: phonological features that are *different* to the L1 may be easier to acquire than those that are *similar*, in some cases. Flege's (1995) Speech Learning Model or SLM predicts that L1/L2 sounds and contrasts that are similar, but not quite the same, will be the most problematic. It has been widely observed in several new varieties of English that the 'short/long' /ɪ, iː/ vowel contrast is not made, leading to the observation that the merger of these vowels is a characteristic of these varieties (Schneider 2004: 1128). In the case of Hong Kong, a comparison with Cantonese provides a possible explanation: there is a similar pair of vowels, but the distinction is allophonic and rule-based, rather than phonemic and contrast-based. The shorter vowel appears before velar consonants, as in *sik* ('eat'). The longer vowel appears before other consonants, as in *dim* ('hour'). These non-phonemic differences do not create meaning contrasts, and are relatively non-salient to Cantonese speakers. The English /ɪ, iː/ phonemic contrast is acoustically similar to the Cantonese vowel pair, explaining the difficulty of acquisition – despite the fact that it creates meaning contrasts (as in *live/leave*), and might be expected to affect intelligibility.

Thus there are some useful pointers to be gained from the SLA research literature regarding the characteristic features of L2 English accents, their patterns of development and variation. But as argued earlier, the linguistic perspective needs to be complemented by a sociolinguistic perspective. Moyer (2013: 41) observes that:

> theories about the intersection of L1 and L2 during the learning process raise compelling questions but provide few definitive answers. It is also remarkable that debates about underlying mechanisms still tend toward a traditional, confined view of SLA, overlooking interaction, learner agency and context as critical forces in acquisition.

A wider view of 'accent' as having both linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions, and of being affected by interaction as well as learning, is of course required. These factors will be reflected in the model of accent variation presented in Chapter 5. The next chapter will move from the temporal frame of learning to that of interaction, though not in the same sense as the 'accent and identity' section above; it focuses on the relationship between accent features and intelligibility.

Notes

1 This perspective has been described as 'the loose coalition of approaches that we call sociocultural linguistics' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 608).
2 I adopt the term 'temporal frame' from Elder-Vass (2012: 87–8), along with his four-part classification of system, interaction, learning and language change.
3 All speakers of English simplify final consonant clusters in largely predictable ways, but L2 learners tend to extent the scope and nature of modification (Schreier 2009: 68).

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4   Accents and communication

Intelligibility in global English

This chapter focuses on the role of accent features in communication. It is therefore mainly concerned with the temporal frame of interaction, and with the concept of *intelligibility*. This is a recurring topic in discussions of global English, and here it is also argued to be an important factor in interaction: while the previous chapter looked at acts of identity, this chapter will suggest the relevance of *acts of intelligibility* in global English. As a prelude, it briefly discusses the concept of 'meaning' and its negotiation, relating this to the practice-based approach introduced in Chapter 2. Both meaning and intelligibility will be considered in relation to the 'systematic' and 'emergent' aspects of language, as also introduced in Chapter 2. In pedagogical approaches there has been some acknowledgment of the systematic/emergent relationship, as in Sussex and Kirkpatrick's 'SEE-LFE' formulation: SEE emphasizes systematicity and predictability, and mainly characterizes writing, while LFE captures the variable, context-specific and emergent nature of spoken communication. The main argument of this chapter is that we should not entirely lose sight of the 'systematic' aspects of spoken communication, even as we contend with unpredictability and allow for speaker agency in the process of interaction.

Systematicity, emergence and intelligibility

One of the major issues in global English, and in the study of language more generally, is that of the apparent tension between its 'systematic' and 'emergent' aspects. The achievement of understanding usually requires prior experience of language forms, and implies the existence of certain stabilities of form and meaning. Yet no two contexts of communication are the same, and 'all language use is innovative, to some degree' (Croft 2000: 104). Before examining the nature of systematicity and emergence as they apply to spoken communication and intelligibility, it is necessary to consider their relevance to general processes of meaning-making. From a practice-based viewpoint, the essence of these processes is stated by Rouse (2001: 192): 'shared meanings … are not the pre-existing facts that would explain the possibility of communication, but the norms presumptively invoked in the course of interpreting something or someone as communicative'. Meaning is seen as being constructed within social and communicative practices;

it does not pre-exist them. As discussed in Chapter 2, the focus on practices can be interpreted as a reaction against the over-determinations of 'structure' and 'system'. The earlier, structuralist position suggests that pre-existing, or at least 'shared', meanings are exchanged between interlocutors using pre-existing communicative signs. From this position linguistic structures, including phonemes, are like 'building blocks': pre-existing units that are to a large extent fixed in an underlying language system, beyond the control of individual speakers.

In global English discourse, practice-based views of language tend to emphasize emergence and speaker agency, implying in some cases that language is created anew in each interaction. Canagarajah (2007: 94) contends that language is not located 'in the mind of the speaker', but is 'a social process constantly reconstructed in sensitivity to environmental factors'. These characterizations of language also indicate the broadly poststructuralist orientation of current approaches to global English. From a poststructuralist perspective, meaning is 'an active construction radically dependent upon the pragmatics of context' (Peters and Burbules 2004: 19). To some extent, it makes little difference whether we consider *content meaning* – the 'basic message' – or *social meaning*, the wider inferences that can be made about the attitudes and social positioning of communicators (McConnell-Ginet 2012: 509). As the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 indicates, the pronunciation of a single word carries vast amounts of indexical information. Similarly, it could be argued that the socially constructed approach to 'meaning' applies more to 'higher-level' structures such as lexicogrammar and genre than to phonemes; there is less flexibility at the level of phonology. There is some truth in this, but nevertheless the 'selection' motif has hidden dangers. Bourdieu's critique of Saussurean objectivism reminds us that to see speakers as 'selecting' from among phonemes is 'to slip from the model of reality to the reality of the model' (1977: 29–30). By this Bourdieu means that linguistic categories such as phonemes are the *product* of interaction, not the resources that permit it. They are thus to some extent negotiable and dynamic, but are always a reflection of power and the structuring effects of past experience.

The focus on emergence captures the inherent variability of global English interaction, and at the theoretical level it provides a welcome antidote to the confines of structuralism. But as Hall's (2013) critique of Makoni and Pennycook's (2007) 'disinvention' project suggests, the emphasis on emergence should not involve the neglect of systematicity, or the rejection of 'mind' in theories of language. The context-specific, emergent aspects of meaning and communication do not exclude the possibility of systematic, more or less predictable phenomena, or the role of cognitive processes. We can appreciate this through the work of Bakhtin. On the one hand, Bakhtin's approach to meaning-making can be taken as fundamentally hostile to the idea of 'system' in any shape or form: 'messages are, strictly speaking, created for the first time in the process of transmission, and ultimately there is no code' (Bakhtin 1979: 352, cited in Todorov 1984: 56). But elsewhere, for example from Bakhtin's notions of centripetal (centring) and centrifugal (decentring) forces, we get the sense there is constant and unavoidable tension between these forces, and thus between systematic and unsystematic tendencies.

The findings of studies relating to *intelligibility* allow us to investigate the nature of these forces as they operate in interaction. The extent to which interlocutors use similar phonological features can be taken as a broad indication of centripetal tendencies. In global English interactions, the specific concerns of intelligibility reseach include: what happens when speakers and listeners from different language backgrounds are used to hearing words pronounced in different ways, following localized, L1-related, or otherwise non-equivalent patterns? Are there specific, identifiable phonological features or contrasts that they tend to rely on, or are there other ways of managing the diversity? How much diversity can they tolerate? As well as revealing some of the ways in which opposing forces – systematic/emergent, centripetal/centrifugal – play out in communication, these questions are important for practical reasons, such as exploring the nature of 'international communication' in English. They also have pedagogical relevance, for example in terms of helping to identify priorities, or in overcoming concerns that local variation may adversely affect communication in global English.

Intelligibility: scope and definitions

Intelligibility is a problematic term, one that needs careful investigation. As noted above, it may be seen as having structuralist connotations, emphasizing the 'pre-existing' rather than the negotiated aspects of communication. In research and pedagogy, giving too much priority to intelligibility can have unintended effects. By focusing on what is recognizably 'English', intelligibility studies tend to automatically exclude phenomena such as geographically and socially restricted codes, low levels of language proficiency and so on. Taking the notion on board in an uncritical fashion may also mean accepting some of the ideological accompaniments of global English. One response has therefore been to question whether 'intelligibility' is a relevant or desirable concept. I return to these critiques at the end of this chapter, but will first consider some definitions of the term as it is used in linguistics and sociolinguistics.

As the practice-based view suggests, the negotiation of meaning in interaction is an extremely complex matter. It involves different levels of language, from phonology to syntax, and non-linguistic as well as linguistic factors. It is therefore unsurprising that Pickering (2006: 220) begins her review of intelligibility studies by observing that there is no fully agreed-upon definition of intelligibility. In WE research there is frequent use of a three-part framework (e.g. Smith 1992). In this framework, the term 'intelligibility' is restricted to the listener's ability to *recognize* words and utterances. The term 'comprehensibility' denotes the ability to *understand* their meaning. The third part of the framework is 'interpretability', or the ability to *interpret* the situational meaning of utterances and the intentions behind them. In this technical sense, intelligibility therefore refers to lower-level processing, with comprehensibility and interpretability involving higher-level processing at semantic and pragmatic levels. The tripartite framework resembles Schutz's (1967: 107) identification of the three levels at which communication takes place. The first level is 'the sign itself', the second level 'what the other

person means by using this sign', and the third level 'the significance of the fact that he is using the sign … in this particular context'.

In practice the three concepts are difficult to keep apart, but looking at the ways they operate in communication helps to disambiguate them. While all three work together in the normal course of events, one can sometimes identify the effects of 'blockage' at one level or another. British speakers who refer to a 'hoover' instead of a 'vacuum cleaner' may not be comprehensible to Americans, even though the word is perfectly intelligible to them. Similar examples could be provided to show the relationships between other levels, but it seems that intelligibility acts as a kind of enabler of comprehensibility and interpretability; without intelligibility, meaning-making cannot proceed, unless non-linguistic means such as gesture or sign language are employed. But the enormous *redundancy* of language means that comprehensibility and interpretability can still be achieved when intelligibility is compromised, as it frequently is in the normal course of communication. At the word level we are constantly making predictions about which sounds and words are likely to come up next, so it is often unnecessary for words to be 'intelligible' in the sense of having all of their phonemes intact. The relationship between intelligibility and comprehensibility therefore hinges on the extent to which phonetic and phonological features can be removed, or altered, while still permitting comprehension. Not all phonemes need to be present and correct in spoken communication, just as not all letters need to be present or legible in written communication. Removing a substantial number of words from a text – 20 per cent, or every fifth word, for example – will not detract greatly _____ comprehension in most cases, _____ the reader will make _____ of prediction and inference, _____ this part of the _____ demonstrates.

The high level of redundancy in language is just as well, considering the sub-optimal conditions – noise, distraction and unfamiliarity, to name but three – under which communication often takes place. But the above illustrations of redundancy rely on the listener's (or the reader's) ability to supply the missing information using predictive skills and contextual knowledge. In spoken interaction this means that the listener has to achieve a certain threshold of understanding so as not to be overwhelmed by the need to 'fill in the gaps'. As every language learner knows, this is more difficult when one is relatively unfamiliar with the language in question. Rajadurai (2007: 102) observes that 'core linguistic features that constitute a minimum threshold level' are prerequisites for communication.

This points to one of the reasons why intelligibility is particularly relevant to considerations of communication in global English: second-language listeners tend to rely more on acoustic, phonological information than native listeners. As Field (2005: 416) observes, non-native listeners 'place great reliance on interpretations at word level, even in the face of contradictory evidence'. With the usual caveats about generalization in place, we can say this is because non-native listeners (or native listeners who are unfamiliar with a register or dialect) have less knowledge of word frequency, collocation and discourse structures. Lacking the ability to 'fill in the gaps' or make informed guesses, second-language listeners may be especially prone to lexical competition, or the unwanted activation of similar (but

different) words (Weber and Cutler 2004). For example, minimal pairs such as *cattle* and *kettle* may be confused. There is also the problem of partial matches: *kettle* may be heard as *catalogue*, or *belly* as *balance*. 'Pseudo-embedded' words can also cause confusion, as when *chess* is heard within the word *chastise* (Cutler 2005: 415). Listeners may fail to recognize words entirely, leading to problems of overall comprehensibility. Cutler (2005: 415) notes that unwanted competitor activation causes a measurable delay in word recognition, possibly leading listeners to 'lose the thread' and give up. So while built-in redundancy creates a wide margin for error – of production and reception – around language, it has its limits, and especially for those who lack familiarity with the patterns involved.

As well as being distinct from comprehensibility and interpretability, the concept of intelligibility also needs to be separated from that of *accentedness*. The study of Munro and Derwing (1999) asked L1 English users to listen to speech samples and rate them for perceived accentedness, on a scale ranging from 'no foreign accent' to 'very strong foreign accent'. Measurements of intelligibility and perceived comprehensibility were also taken. There was some evidence to suggest that the three constructs are 'related but partially independent dimensions' (1999: 302); more precisely, the listener ratings showed higher correlations between intelligibility and perceived comprehensibility than between intelligibility and accentedness. The conclusion of the researchers is that 'a strong foreign accent does not necessarily cause L2 speech to be low in comprehensibility or intelligibility' (1999: 305). The problem here is that accentedness is also a 'perceived' measure; the challenge is to find out 'which particular aspects of foreign-accented speech are most detrimental to comprehensibility and intelligibility' (Munro and Derwing 1999: 305). The need for a features-based approach to intelligibility is indicated.

Research studies and intelligibility

Regardless of whether we are interested in international communication or pronunciation teaching, a key question related to intelligibility is thus: which features do we focus on? How much, and what kind of information can be removed or altered in spoken language? Following on from the discussion of practice-based and poststructuralist approaches, the terms 'removal' and 'alteration' have to be dealt with carefully, to avoid implying the existence of a pre-existing system or privileging some repertoires over others. If we compare speech with dictionary forms or with spellings, all speakers (including native speakers) 'remove' certain sounds, even in formal settings. Informal interaction, and rapid speech, are often characterized by a tendency towards economy rather than clarity. We can usefully visualize a continuum of carefulness, with several possible labels (e.g. economy/clarity, hypoarticulation/hyperarticulation and so on). But the findings of intelligibility studies suggest that within this variability, some phonological features and contrasts tend to be more important than others in achieving understanding. In this way they help to indicate the nature of systematicity and emergence, and show the interaction of centripetal and centrifugal forces as

they occur in communication. This section will provide an overview of research findings related to intelligibility.

In research studies, 'intelligibility' is sometimes used, rather confusingly, as a cover term for the general ability to understand (e.g. Kirkpatrick *et al.* 2008). This reflects the epistemological and methodological difficulties of keeping intelligibility and comprehensiblity apart, and unless there is a particular reason for focusing on one, rather than the other, it is probably better to see them as slightly different aspects of this 'general ability to understand'. The term 'intelligibility' will be used here in the Smith and Nelson sense of 'recognition', but with some allowance for the fact that it is difficult to separate intelligibility from comprehensibility. In studies that do make the distinction, such as Munro and Derwing (1999), intelligibility is usually measured via transcription tasks that seek to assess word recognition. Comprehensibility is usually measured using questionnaire items that ask listeners to assess the ease of understanding.

Intelligibility therefore appears to be a relatively 'objective' concept. But as we would expect from the complex nature of 'meaning', and from the fact the components of understanding cannot easily be separated from one another, intelligibility studies tend to be marked by considerable disagreement. An early manifestation of this was the debate over whether segmental or suprasegmental features are more important. Some studies indicated the greater contribution of the latter, but one explanation for this, according to Jenkins (2000), is that many were based on interaction between native and non-native speakers; for example, Derwing and Munro (1997) used native-speaker ratings of 'prosodic goodness'. There seems to be little point in revisiting the debate here. The two areas are best seen as complementary to each other (Kohler 2011), and both are therefore relevant to considerations of accent and pronunciation in global English. In any case, a strict separation between segmental and suprasegmental features is often difficult to maintain, because of their complementarity. Suprasegmental features such as rhythm and stress affect the way segmental features are pronounced. A vowel difference may be the result of a stress difference; *written* may sound like *retain* to many listeners if it is pronounced with second-syllable stress, partly because the vowel quality changes as a result. Field (2005) reports the findings of Cutler and Clifton (1984), who found that intelligibility was 'seriously compromised' when a shift of stress also involved a change of vowel quality.

But there is an additional, more fundamental reason for the lack of consensus in the findings of intelligibility studies. Despite the problems involved in identifying 'groups' of language users – native/non-native, 'Chinese', 'British' and so on – much intelligibility research has been conducted along precisely these group lines, largely ignoring the enormous variation that exists within them. For example, the study of Bent and Bradlow (2003) identified a 'matched interlanguage intelligibility benefit'. This meant that non-native listeners found it easier to understand speakers with the same first language. Munro *et al.* (2006) investigated the mutual intelligibility of L2 English speakers (from Japanese, Spanish, Cantonese and Polish L1 backgrounds) for groups of L2 listeners (with Japanese, Cantonese, Mandarin and English as L1s). The researchers found little

or no evidence of an 'intelligibility benefit' in terms of matched countries of origin; Cantonese listeners did not understand the Cantonese speaker any better than the other listener groups. Being familiar with an accent did not help either. The English listeners did not understand the Polish speakers any better than the other groups, despite stating that they were familiar with the Polish English accent.

In Munro *et al.*'s study, neither familiarity nor first-language background appeared to confer significant advantages on the listeners, and the researchers focus on the importance of what they call 'stimulus properties' – i.e. speaker factors such as accent features – rather than on listener factors. They do not, however, identify what these stimulus properties may be, and we are left with rather unsatisfactory generalizations about nation-state or language groupings and their associated 'accents'. In many of these studies, having 'the same' first language is assumed to mean that the speakers' English accents will also be more or less 'the same' – this is not an assumption that withstands scrutiny in the complex and stratified world of global English. A way beyond the 'group' impasse is therefore to focus on the *features* that affect intelligibility. This not only gets closer to the all-important question of what kind of phonological information is most useful; it also avoids the untenable assumption that speakers with the same L1 background form a homogeneous group (Doerr 2009: 185). One of the central claims of this book is that, given the complexities of global English, we cannot make meaningful generalizations about groups of speakers defined along the lines of traditional speech communities, or following 'native/non-native' dichotomies. The features-oriented approach of corpus-based studies, introduced below, appears to be a promising way of transcending the problematic reliance on groups, and on unanalysed 'accents' that are assumed to be typical of those groups.

Corpus-based approaches and the Lingua Franca Core

While early studies of intelligibility tended to reflect the view that non-native speakers would need to communicate mainly with native speakers, the focus has shifted towards 'international intelligibility' (Jenkins 2000) and a more global outlook. This means that various kinds of interaction – between non-native speakers, and between them and native speakers – are taken into account. Most of these studies have taken a corpus-based approach, in which actual instances of miscommunication are identified and their causes analysed. One such research study is that of Jenkins (2000), whose Lingua Franca Core (LFC) research identified the causes of intelligibility problems in interactions among learners of English from various backgrounds. Jenkins's (2000) book *The Phonology of English as an International Language* was a game-changing combination of arguments for the 'why' – the need for change – with concrete proposals for the 'what', in terms of teaching the pronunciation of English. It has had considerable influence, not only on pronunciation teaching but also on the entire global English debate. I will return to the book, and to ELF, in the next chapter, when I examine the 'models debate' in more general terms; here I will focus on the methodological and intelligibility-related aspects of corpus-based studies.

Corpus-based research has the great advantage of being representative of the actual conditions in which global English interactions often occur, for example in groups of international students (as in Jenkins 2000) or among teachers attending an international conference (as in Deterding and Kirkpatrick 2006). It also enables a focus on actually occurring instances of communication breakdown; Jenkins's research identified cases of 'problematic discourse' or 'pragmatic failure' linked to the presence or absence of phonological features (Jenkins 2000: 84). But there are of course several drawbacks with the approach. Breakdowns in communication are rare in normal conversation, where a 'let it pass' principle often applies – we don't always signal misunderstanding, but prefer to wait and see if the problem will resolve itself (see Firth 1996). As a result, the amount of data in these 'corpora of misunderstandings' tends to be quite small. In Jenkins (2000) there were forty instances, and in other studies the number ranges between five (Deterding and Kirkpatrick 2006) and eleven (Deterding 2011). Another aspect of this problem is that understanding, and misunderstanding, are always a matter of degree. Unless communication breaks down entirely, or a participant responds or behaves unexpectedly, we might not realize that misunderstanding has occurred.

A further drawback of the corpus-based approach is what might be called the speaker/listener problem. It is often uncertain whether instances of communication breakdown are related to the speaker's pronunciation, the listener's processing or a combination of both. Jenkins (2000: 132) took account of this by assessing 'the relative contribution of speaker and hearer(s)'. In one case, where confusion occurred between *red car* and *let car*, the Japanese speaker's L1-related pronunciation of /r/ as [l] caused *red* to be pronounced [led] (Jenkins 2002: 90). The Swiss-German listener's L1-related difficulty in perceiving voiced/voiceless distinctions at the end of words may have caused this to be processed as *let*. Both speaker and listener factors may therefore have contributed to the activation of *let car* instead of the speaker's intended *red car*. Speaker-based and listener-based explanations are both plausible, based on L1/L2 comparisons (there is no phonemic /r, l/ distinction in Japanese, and there are no voiced final plosives such as /d/ in German). Other explanatory factors are also possible, such as the Japanese speaker's ability to differentiate between words with voiceless/voiced final consonants; this is a notoriously difficult area for L2 learners of English. The vowel in a word such as *let* tends to be shorter than in words like *led* or *red*, because of the absence of voicing in the final consonant, and this may also be implicated in the misunderstanding. These factors indicate yet another problem for corpus-based studies: phonological features co-occur, and in naturally occurring data it can be hard to establish the main source of difficulty.

I will return to the problem of co-occurrence after outlining the findings of the Lingua Franca Core, or LFC (Jenkins 2000). The core consists of the phonological features that were found to be most important in maintaining intelligibility in international communication. It therefore addresses the question raised earlier, of how much and what kind of information can be 'removed' or 'altered' without reducing intelligibility. The four core areas identified as maintaining intelligibility by Jenkins (2000) are:

- Vowel contrasts that are maintained by length or quantity, such as the difference between *sit* and *seat.* Contrasts that are maintained by quality, such as the difference between *sit* and *sat*, are generally less important, but the so-called NURSE or /ɜ:/ vowel appears to play an important role in maintaining intelligibility.
- All consonants, except for the dental fricative or TH sounds, and certain position-specific consonantal realizations such as 'dark l' (the sound at the end of words like *fall* in some accents). L1-influenced pronunciations of consonants are acceptable, but not if they lead to ambiguity.
- Initial and medial consonant clusters: the consecutive consonant sounds in the beginning and middle of words like *problem* must be maintained. Complex final consonant clusters such as that in *facts* can be simplified in certain ways; these resemble native-speaker patterns of simplification (Jenkins 2000: 143). Consonant deletion is more of a threat to intelligibility than consonant addition (Jenkins 2000: 142).
- Nuclear (or tonic) stress: this aspect of intonation is important for intelligibility, as in the case of contrastive stress; *this is my paper* can be stressed in four different ways using contrastive stress, each with a slightly different meaning.

The intelligibility-based core/non-core approach is a distinctive characteristic of the LFC, one that builds on earlier work such as Ogden's (1930) *Basic English*, Hockett's (1958) common core and Jenner's (1989) list of priorities for pronunciation teaching. The idea of a core is an attractive one. It allows variation to occur in non-core areas, thus accommodating a certain amount of local diversity and situational variability. Its relevance for international communication, language teaching and testing is clear.

The subtitle of Jenkins's book was *New Models, New Norms, New Goals.* Much discussion of the LFC has focused on the contentious question of whether it actually shows evidence of 'new norms' in international communication, or constitutes a 'new model' for pronunciation teaching (see Dziubalska-Kolaczyk and Przedlacka 2005). In the next chapter I will consider the ideological aspects of the LFC and of ELF research in general, but it is already possible to see that the LFC does not suggest novelty. On the contrary, in terms of its pedagogical indications it is fairly conservative. Almost all of the consonantal features and contrasts in so-called 'native speaker' models are found to be necessary for intelligibility; almost the only exceptions are the dental fricatives, which can safely be replaced by easier sounds. But there is nothing new in suggesting that they are unimportant. In terms of 'norms' they are often substituted in native speaker accents, and in terms of 'models' or 'goals' Gillian Brown noted in 1974 that 'when time is short it is probably not worth teaching /θ/ and /ð/ if students find them difficult' (Brown 1974: 53). Although it has often been interpreted as evidence of novelty or difference – Cook (2011: 149) believes that 'the phonology of ELF is different from that of native English' – the LFC research arguably emphasizes the centripetal, rather than the centrifugal, forces that operate in

international communication. Non-native speakers tend to converge on similar sound categories and contrasts to make themselves understood, and these are much the same as the features relied upon by native speakers.

In this chapter I will argue that an explanation for these centripetal tendencies is provided by the concept of *functional load*, but it is first necessary to examine the contents of the LFC in more detail. The LFC prioritizes segmental features. Word stress is not included, and the only suprasegmental feature in the core is nuclear stress. The overall position taken by Jenkins (2000: 135–6) is that while both segmental and suprasegmental areas are important in pronunciation instruction, the relative emphasis depends partly on the needs of the learners – whether they live or intend to live in a country where English is a native language, and thus whether they are more likely to communicate with native or non-native speakers. Suprasegmentals are seen to be more relevant for accentedness than for intelligibility (Jenkins 2000: 136).

The LFC makes an implicit distinction between core and non-core features. The derivation of the core features is reasonably straightforward: after allowing for the 'relative contribution of speaker and hearer', intelligibility problems were traced to accent features. For example, the Japanese speaker mentioned above pronounced the /r/ of *red* with a sound that resembled [l]; this substitution caused the listener to hear the word *let*, and the consonantal contrast between /r/ and /l/ is therefore assumed to be important for intelligibility. This does not mean that the precise realization of /r/ has to be 'native-like' – this varies among native speakers, of course – only that it is capable of being differentiated from other consonants in word-initial position. The LFC thus allows for variation, while maintaining the gravitational force of a core. By stating what L2 English speakers need to possess in terms of phonological features, the LFC draws attention to the accent features that are most problematic. These include many of the substitutions, modifications and deletions referred to in Chapter 3. The LFC can also be seen as a guide for native speakers, however. Jenkins (2000: 139) suggests that postvocalic /r/ in words like *car* should be sounded, disadvantaging many British speakers, and – lest Americans should feel left out – advises against T-voicing in words like *better* (or in Michael Jackson's rendition of *beat it*; in both cases /t/ starts to resemble a /d/). These recommendations appear to be based on the more general criterion of maximizing sound-spelling correspondence, as there were no native speakers in the LFC research.

However, as mentioned above, the *co-occurrence* of features presents yet another problem for the corpus approach to misunderstanding, as opposed to studies that focus on limited aspects of the speech signal. For example, in Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006) the pronunciation of *pearl* – British English dictionary form /pɜːl/ – as [bɑːl] involves, in addition to the vowel substitution noted by the researchers, the reduced aspiration of initial /p/ (this is a common accent feature in Southeast and South Asia). For listeners accustomed to distinguishing between initial /p/ and /b/ on the basis of aspiration this would be expected to cause confusion in itself, but the co-occurrence of a vowel substitution made the problem fatal for intelligibility purposes. Co-occurrence means that a feature

which may appear to be unproblematic on its own – such as dental fricative substitution – may in fact be problematic when it occurs with other features.

It is interesting that there is considerable agreement between the LFC findings and those of other corpus-based studies. These also suggest the importance of segmental features, and within this the greater importance of consonants as opposed to vowels. Corpus-based studies have supported the LFC's contention that modifications of initial consonant clusters tend to cause more problems than those of final consonant clusters. A study of ELF interactions in the ASEAN region (Deterding and Kirkpatrick 2006; Kirkpatrick 2010) resembled Jenkins's LFC research in its approach to the causes of communication problems, and lends support to the LFC's conclusions. Five accent-related cases of misunderstanding were noted by Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006: 402):

1   Vowel substitution: using [ɑ:] in place of /ɜ:/ (*pearl* [bɑːl] *beads*)
2   Initial consonant cluster reduction: *three* [tiː] *teacher*
3   Consonant substitution: using [n] in place of /l/: *big holes* [hoʊnz]
4   Consonant substitution: using [ʃ] in place of /s/: *some sauce* [ʃɔːs]
5   Consonant insertion: *more English than us* [ʌts]

The researchers themselves note (p. 406) that these features also caused intelligibility problems in Jenkins's LFC research. In a subsequent study partly based on the same database, Deterding (2011: 94) lists eleven instances of misunderstanding and concludes that 'nearly all the problems are caused by consonant substitutions'. The study of Tsuzuki and Nakamura (2009), although featuring native-speaker listeners and a transcription-based, rather than a corpus-based, methodology, reaches similar conclusions. The main cause of intelligibility problems was substitutions and deletions of consonants, whether occurring singly or in clusters. In the latter case, initial consonant cluster reduction caused two of the problems, reinforcing the findings of the LFC concerning the greater importance of initial clusters.

Although patterns seem to emerge in the data, the nature of intelligibility studies is that, under different conditions, different features may be more important for intelligibility. The vowel/consonant issue is a case in point. Zielinski (2008) found that vowel substitutions reduced intelligibility in two of the three speech samples employed in her study, which involved native-speaker listeners. Further research is clearly needed, and this issue draws attention to another limitation of the corpus-based approach: namely that it focuses on the temporal frame of 'interaction' and hides that of 'learning'. If corpus-based studies find that fewer instances of miscommunication can be traced to vowel modifications, there are at least two possible conclusions. One is that vowel modifications do not matter, as listeners can cope with most kinds of variation – this is the conclusion reached by the LFC, except in the case of vowel length contrasts. On the other hand, it may mean that they matter very much – so much so that speakers have already learned to keep variation within tolerable limits.

Other researchers have identified intelligibility-preserving features that are not in the LFC. Tsuzuki and Nakamura's list includes word stress modification,

and the importance of word stress for intelligibility has also been noted by other studies (Field 2005; Hahn 2004; Zielinski 2008). Word stress is classed as a suprasegmental or prosodic feature, and its effects on intelligibility may partly explain the emphasis placed on suprasegmentals in earlier studies (e.g. Anderson-Hsieh and Koehler 1988). Arguably, however, some of these earlier findings can also be taken as evidence of the importance of segmental features. Stressed syllables serve as 'islands of reliability' in the speech signal (Bond and Small 1983), providing important acoustic clues for the listener. They act as foci in the search for meaning, and direct the listener towards salient clues – namely, the segmental contents of the stressed syllable.

I have noted some of the limitations of corpus-based studies of intelligibility, but the relevance for global English is clear: they involve real language, rather than manipulated or rehearsed samples, language that is used for a real communicative purpose with real listeners. There are also consistent patterns in their findings. We can provisionally acknowledge these patterns by noting that:

- Consonants appear to be more important than vowels.
- Some phonemic contrasts are more important than others.
- Initial consonant clusters are more important than final ones.

However, possible explanations of these findings have received relatively little attention in the intelligibility literature. I will consider the explanatory potential of *functional load*, defined in narrow and broad terms, in the next section.

Intelligibility and functional load

In the following sections I am going to explore the systematic/emergent, SEE/LFE relationship by further examining the concept of intelligibility and the findings of research studies. The argument I shall make goes roughly as follows: there are commonalities in the findings of intelligibility studies that appear to reflect the influence of 'functional' or systematic factors, such as frequency of occurrence and participation in phonological contrast. The functional basis of intelligibility is argued to be significant: it provides a theoretical complement to the empirical studies, one that assists in understanding their findings, and strengthens the case for applying them to pedagogical matters of teaching and testing. It may seem that these centripetal factors are incompatible with practice-based views of language, but I will go on to argue that they emerge from everyday communicative practices.

The concept of functional load relates to the fact that certain features and contrasts 'do more work' than others. In a narrow sense, it is defined as the number of pairs of words that a particular phonemic contrast serves to keep distinct (Catford 1987: 88). The contrast between /t/ and /d/ has a high functional load in English as it distinguishes between a large number of word pairs (*time* and *dime*, etc.), while /ð/ and /θ/ do not (*thy* and *thigh* being one of the few pairs that exist). It is relatively easy to compute the functional load of different contrasts, but if we are interested in its effects it soon becomes clear that it depends on several

interrelated factors. As well as the number of minimal pairs (such as *time/dime*) that a phoneme pair serves to differentiate, a detailed consideration of functional load would have to take into account how many pairs have the same part of speech, and also the frequency with which the words occur. For example, the vowel pair /ɪ/ and /iː/ distinguish a large number of minimal pairs in English. But among these, conflation of the pair *live/leave* (both high-frequency verbs) is more likely to cause confusion than, say, *chip/cheap* (noun or verb, and adjective). In Hong Kong, between Cantonese speakers, I have witnessed momentary confusion between *I live on the fourteenth* (floor) and *I leave on the fourteenth* (of the month).

In order to compare the functional loads of phoneme contrasts, Catford (1987) provides lists for vowel and consonant pairs, but no account is taken of word frequency or part of speech. The highest rankings are given to contrasts such as /ɪ, æ/ and /ɪ, iː/ in the case of vowels, and /k, h/ and /p, b/ in the case of consonants. The lowest-ranked vowel and consonant contrasts include /æ, ɑː/ and /ð, θ/. The lists of Brown (1991a) include factors such as phoneme frequency, obtained from text samples. However, there is general agreement between the rankings of Catford and Brown, indicating that the comcept has some robustness. In their study of the intelligibility effects of different contrasts, Munro and Derwing (2006) did not find any significant conflict between the two sets of rankings.

Beyond this 'narrow' sense of functional load it is possible, and desirable, to define it more broadly as the information-carrying capacity of phonological features. In this case whole classes of sounds can be compared, with some interesting results; Surendran and Levow (2004) found that in Mandarin Chinese, the functional load of tones is at least as high as that of vowels. However, the main point I wish to make in this section is that functional load, in both 'narrow' and 'broad' senses, can be invoked as a possible explanatory factor for the findings of intelligibility studies. In its broader sense, functional load suggests two things. First, it indicates the limits of redundancy: while all speakers show a tendency to exploit redundancy and reduce the amount of phonological information, for example by reducing vowels and simplifying consonant clusters, words will be unrecognizable if too much information is lost. Second, it also suggests the greater importance of consonants. Vowel-free text messages (i.e. *txt msgs*) indicate that consonants have a relatively higher functional load, and the principle is also relevant in spoken communication. The 'texting analogy' can be illustrated by removing the consonant letters from a sentence:

    i e a o ea ea oo, e a o ie oe

Deciphering this sentence is all but impossible. A reasonable guess might be that the 'o' letters represent common words such as *to* or *so*, but the intelligibility and comprehensibility levels are close to zero. The 'cavemen' cartoon in Figure 4.1 shows the same sentence with only the consonants, leaving out the vowels.

(In case there is any doubt, we are supposed to exploit our linguistic knowledge to arrive at *If we want to talk really good, we'll have to invent vowels.*) Of course, the 'texting analogy' relies on the removal of vowel *letters*, rather than
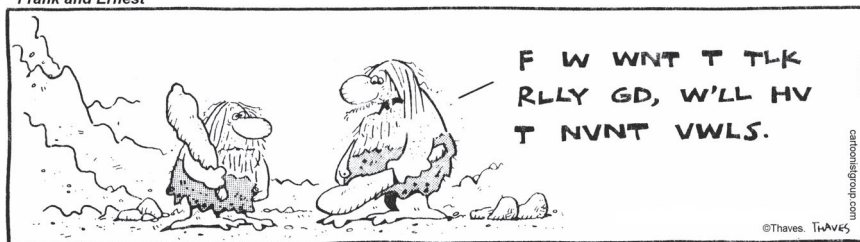
Figure 4.1 Frank and Ernest, used with the permission of the Thaves and the Cartoonist Group. All rights reserved.

vowel *sounds*; the letter 'y' in the word *really* is a vowel sound. But within its limitations, the analogy suggests that what holds true for writing may also hold true for speech: listeners can tolerate a large amount of reduction in information content, but – other things being equal – they can tolerate vowel reduction more than consonant reduction. In addition to the kind of reduction that occurs in rapid speech there is a tremendous amount of variation in vowel realization, even among native speakers. There is some statistical evidence for the importance of consonants. Cutler (2005) computed that for English words of different lengths there are about 2.2 times as many lexical neighbours if a consonant is replaced (*cat* becoming *mat*) than if a vowel is replaced (*cat* becoming *cot*).

However, there are other limitations to the texting analogy, and thus to the applicability of both theoretical and empirical evidence in this area. First, it makes an 'other things being equal' assumption that the remaining consonants are unmodified; in written form the consonants are standardized and unambiguous, but in spoken form they may be subject to modification of their own. This is a manifestation of the 'co-occurrence' problem mentioned above in the context of intelligibility studies. Abbott (1991) warns against de-emphasizing the importance of vowels in language teaching because there are often co-occurring features – modified consonants, altered word stress and so on – that can make vowel modifications problematic. Second, it presupposes that the reader or listener has already been exposed to the words involved, and is therefore primed to supply the missing information in the form of the 'right' vowel. Second language learners may not be in a position to do so, and furthermore the relative importance of vowels and consonants may vary at different stages of learning. So although functional factors help to explain the apparent importance of consonants in intelligibility studies, they cannot easily be used to make detailed recommendations for pronunciation teaching without further research within the time frames of both interaction and learning.

In its broader sense, functional load also helps to explain the apparent importance of initial consonant clusters. Three of the eleven intelligibility problems listed by Deterding (2011) involve modifications or deletions of initial consonant clusters, as when *Black Swan* was heard as *Rex One* because the second consonant of *black* was pronounced as an 'r'-like sound.[1] In Deterding

and Kirkpatrick (2006), the pronunciation of *three* as [ti:] was problematic. There are functional explanations for the importance of initial clusters. Sounds at the beginning of words are generally more important for intelligibility than those at the end, because word recognition proceeds from the beginning of the word, with some scope for recursive operation. Modifications towards the end of the word are less likely to cause problems as word recognition will often already be advanced (Cutler 2005; Schreier 2005). Initial clusters thus have a higher functional load, in the broad sense of the term. Shannon (1951: 55) notes that the beginning of words is 'where the line of thought has more chance of branching out', and thus it is where substitutions or deletions will often have the greatest effect.

In its narrower sense, functional load offers a possible explanation of why some contrasts are more important than others. Eight of the nine consonantal features identified as causing intelligibility problems by Deterding (2011) involve contrasts with a high functional load.[2] These included the substitution of [l] for /n/ in the words *nearby* and *night*, which caused confusion between a Cantonese speaker from China and listeners from Brunei. In terms of vowels, functional load supports one of Jenkins's findings, namely the importance of vowel contrasts maintained by length or quantity. In particular, the /ɪ, i:/ contrast is noted by Jenkins (2000); this is given a functional load rating of 95 per cent by Catford (1987). As mentioned above, its high functional load results from the existence of a large number of minimal pairs, many of which contain words that occur frequently or belong to the same word class.

Functional factors therefore appear to be relevant in explaining some of the findings of corpus-based intelligibility studies. Thus it is somewhat surprising that few empirical studies have investigated the relationship between functional load and intelligibility. Munro and Derwing (2006) tested the 'functional load hypothesis', namely that substitutions involving phoneme pairs with a high functional load, such as /n, l/, are more likely to cause communication problems. The researchers employed the Catford and Brown rankings of functional load to distinguish between high- and low-functional load contrasts. They found that errors with a high functional load significantly affected ratings of perceived accentedness and comprehensibility, while those with a low functional load only affected comprehensibility and had minimal impact on them. As in the study of Deterding (2011), significant errors involving contrasts with a high functional load included the substitution of [n] for /l/ in initial position, affecting the words *lawyer, library* and *lion*, and the substitution of [s] for /ʃ/, affecting the word *shoe*. The low functional load errors involved substitutions of the dental fricative or TH sounds, as in 'mispronunciations' of the words *the, than,* and *month*. Again, the findings in this area – the relative importance of different consonantal contrasts – echo those of the LFC and other corpus-based studies.

The conclusion of Munro and Derwing (2006: 529) is that their study offers preliminary confirmation of the functional load hypothesis. Considering the evidence as a whole, it seems reasonable to conclude that functional load (in the narrow and broad senses introduced here) may help to explain why certain accent and pronunciation features reduce intelligibility more than others. The concept is

therefore still relevant for pronunciation instruction, although there is a need for further research. Before giving it too great a role, however, we need to consider some of the more sociolinguistic objections to this apparently 'systematic' influence on spoken communication.

Intelligibility as practice

If we recall the practice-based view of language introduced in Chapter 2, and combine this with the emphasis on 'emergence' in current studies of global English, it is unsurprising that 'functional' or systematic explanations appear to be an anathema in global English discourse. Jenkins (2000) shows considerable ambivalence towards functional load, even though – as shown above – it goes a considerable way towards explaining the findings of the LFC research. At one point Jenkins uses the low functional load of the dental fricatives to support the use of substitutions by L2 speakers (2000: 138), but then discounts the concept by stating that 'solid evidence' is preferable to 'intuition, functional load and frequency counts' (p. 144). The empirical (or corpus-based) approach taken by Jenkins is intended to 'correct the assumption that intelligibility is a function of relative frequency in naturally occurring speech' (2000: 131) – in other words, that it depends upon a pre-given 'system' and its pre-assigned functions, which prevents or limits the 'emergent' or alternative negotiation of intelligibility by individual speakers, especially non-native speakers. Nevertheless, functional load appears to explain much of the 'solid evidence' presented by Jenkins, as it does with similar corpus-based studies.

From a practice-based perspective there also appears to be little room for such 'functional' explanations. In Chapter 2 we saw that practice-based approaches eschew 'function' in general. Canagarajah (2013: 65) interprets Pennycook's (2010) distinction between *function* and *practice* as follows:

> The former assumes that there is a preconstructed form that serves some functions, after the fact. The practice-based perspective perceives form and function as emerging from practice.

The de-centring, practice-based objection to functional load is as follows: measuring it via 'text samples' or lists of minimal pairs merely reveals the effects of *past* communicative acts and practices. If we acknowledge this in characterizations of English, or in pedagogy, we are reproducing dominant practices, and native-speaker norms. Function appears to downplay agency in favour of an external 'system', one that leaves little freedom for modification or change. To make the case for its relevance, it is therefore necessary to clarify what is meant by 'function'. What I want to explore in this section is the extent to which function, and intelligibility, can also be viewed as aspects of practice.

Here, I use the term 'function' to refer to how linguistic elements are used for particular purposes in communicative practices. The notion of function is therefore closely linked to that of system, but they are not identical; according

to Halliday (2013: 13), 'the 'nature of the linguistic system is that it has to be explained in functional terms'. There are two relevant aspects of 'system'. One is the *internal* aspect in which linguistic elements relate to other elements, for example in the sense that /t/ and /d/ exist in a relationship of contrast (regardless of their precise realisations). The other, *external* aspect is the way in which these elements are used in communicative practices – this is the sense of 'function' I am concentrating on in this section. Function manifests itself in the form of observable regularities in linguistic behaviour, in which linguistic categories – phonemes, for example – are used to distinguish between words and realize particular meanings.

Although this may appear to reinstate the notion of 'system', it is very different to structuralist conceptions of it as something that underlies or explains the surface regularities. If instead we think of system as itself being *emergent*, a different perspective appears. The system, such as it is, does not pre-exist acts of communication. But the effect of repeated communicative acts is to create the *appearance* of system. From a practice-based perspective, we might say that the systematic aspects of communication represent 'the inherited resultants of previous activities', but are also 'the continual accomplishments of present behaviour' (Layder 1997: 101). In the temporal frame of learning, for example in childhood or classroom language acquisition, speakers notice regularities of form and function, or form and meaning, and incorporate them into their repertoires – in fact, this is what language learning largely consists of. In the temporal frame of interaction, speakers notice that these regularities have particular effects and tend to rely on them in subsequent encounters, simultaneously noticing the extent to which other speakers rely on similar forms. A practice-based perspective on the emergence of phonological systems is given by Port and Leary (2005: 956):

> What is universal about phonology is not any fixed list of sound types, but rather the strong tendency of human language learners to discover or create sound categories out of what they hear. Human infants seek categories of sound types in the speech around them – even before they learn their first word. Children discover patterns in various size ranges. And different members of a speech community may easily learn approximately the same patterns. This process, continued over time, yields a vocabulary suggesting the tables of minimally contrastive words that are often found – the ones that are taken to be evidence for discrete features.

From this viewpoint there is no 'underlying system'. Regularities are functional in origin, and reflect Croft's (2000: 97) observation regarding the 'regular solution' of 'recurrent coordination problems' – 'problems' here meaning the question of how to differentiate words and create recognizable meanings. Similarities in the findings of intelligibility studies are an indication of similarities in the communicative practices of language users, across different populations; functional load provides a partial explanation for them.

This does not adequately deal with the question of why there are similarities, however. It should be clear from the above account that the functional load

of phoneme contrasts is a result of the work they do in distinguishing lexical contrasts; the ultimate origin of functional load is in the lexis. But as Port and Royal's comment suggests, 'the lexis' cannot be seen as entirely pre-given either; it is also the result of communicative practices. If we compare patterns of use in global English, we find that 'words' have significant differences in terms of frequency and phonological shapes. Although relatively stable, the lexis also shows variability and the effects of 'systematic' and 'emergent' tendencies.

To illustrate this, and to further establish both the relevance and the limitations of functional load, I will use the example of an intelligibility incident provided by Abbott (1991: 233). A and B are two Ugandan teachers of Abbott's acquaintance, conversing in a staffroom:

> A: It was impossible to teach because of the [disˈtrakʃən] .
> B: Do you mean [ˈdistrakʃən] (distraction) or [ˈdestrakʃən] (destruction)?

The functional explanation for this intelligibility incident is clear: speakers of English in East Africa do not make much use of the phonological contrast between /æ/ and /ʌ/ (Mesthrie 2004: 1100). The contrast has a high functional load in the lists of both Catford (1987) and Brown (1991a). The first thing the example shows is that the absence of a contrast from speakers' accents or phonological repertoires does not necessarily mean that the contrast has no functional load. Functional load is related to lexical patterns. The /æ, ʌ/ contrast still has functional load because there are lexical items – such as *distraction/destruction* – that listeners are aware of and which cannot easily be distinguished in other ways.[3]

Abbott's example therefore suggests that intelligibility has *intranational*, as well as international, dimensions; this aspect of intelligibility is explored further in Chapter 7. It is not the case that because speakers come from the same place and use 'the same' accent or variety, they will automatically be intelligible to each other. However, I am not, of course, suggesting that the speakers in East Africa 'ought to' adopt the /æ, ʌ/ contrast. The example also illustrates the limitations of 'functional' explanations, if they are applied without regard to particular contexts: speakers can (and do) function without certain contrasts, even those with a high individual functional load. If ambiguity arises, they can rely on exaggerated 'spelling pronunciation', as above, or on explicit clarification of spelling. If the absence of a contrast were particularly problematic, we might expect to find speakers adopting other phonological clues to distinguish between words. The words themselves might change their frequencies. To avoid confusing *ship* and *sheep* – an unlikely source of difficulty in any case – one could call the former a *boat* instead. In many cases, then, the lack of a feature or contrast may not matter very much: it probably takes far more time and effort to acquire certain contrasts than it does to occasionally disambiguate meanings.

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the speakers in Abbott's example are not learners of English, and that they have already acquired a repertoire of phonological contrasts that adequately serves their processes of meaning-making. The imperatives of functional load, in the broad sense, still operate:

there must be sufficient phonological information if interaction is not to be seriously impeded. But the view of language that emerges from this example is not one *où tout se tient*, in the famous phrase of Meillet; it is more of a 'jerry-built structure' (Bolinger 1976: 1, in Croft 2000: 231). Regardless of the level of analysis, linguistic 'systems' are not 'rigid, homogeneous, self-contained, or "finely balanced"' (Croft 2000: 231).

If we further consider the nature of centripetal forces and think about why speakers have pairs of words like *distraction/destruction* within their awareness at all, we realize that they are largely established by literacy and the prevalence of written language, in education, print media and now the internet. One of the paradoxical effects of globalization is that we have come to rely more on the written word, and in many cases – in much English education, for example – people are exposed to word-images more often than word-sounds. Gleick (2011: 29–30), drawing on the work of Ong (1982), observes that the electronic age is one of 'secondary orality' – 'the spoken word amplified and extended as never before, but always in the context of literacy: voices heard against a background of ubiquitous print'. Literacy practices can be seen as one of the 'anchoring practices' that 'play a key role in reproducing larger systems of discourse and practice' (Swidler 2001: 90). Among these literacy practices, shared knowledge of spelling is often used by speakers from different backgrounds to resolve ambiguity. In the example above, one might argue that it serves to compensate for the lack of a phonological contrast in the speakers' repertoires, and thus that it encourages accent variation. But more generally, literacy practices and written language appear to serve as centripetal forces in global English, establishing and reinforcing patterns of frequency and functional load, and leading to similarities in the findings of intelligibility studies. As usual, there are also ideological factors at work here: literacy tends to lead people to *think* that they, or native speakers, are speaking 'the same' language.

If we return to the findings of intelligibility studies, as outlined in this chapter, and consider them from a practice-based viewpoint, some general points emerge. Intelligibility is something that is established in innumerable interactions, each of which draw upon previously encountered linguistic features while still being open to 'emergent' variation. Phonological features and contrasts form part of 'the infrastructure of repeated interactional patterns' (Swidler 2001: 85), along with other aspects of linguistic knowledge such as awareness of lexical items and their spelling; literacy practices arguably serve to 'anchor' both language learning and communicative interaction. Even in prototypical 'lingua franca' encounters between speakers with different language backgrounds and accents, intelligibility studies suggest that there is considerable similarity in phonological terms: speakers' previous experience will already have involved 'regular solutions' in the form of regularly-occurring contrasts, and these are largely relied upon in subsequent encounters. Even if they spend their lives 'shuttling between communities' (Canagarajah 2005: p. xxviii), their reliance on these solutions as speakers and listeners creates and reinforces patterns of functional load; this is in fact what the findings of corpus-based studies such as the LFC demonstrate.

The 'core' metaphor of the LFC is quite accurate in that it creates a picture of accent variation taking place around a cluster of recurring features and contrasts. But despite the regularities, from a practice-based perspective it also has the disadvantage of suggesting a static, pre-existing body of features, one with inescapable gravitational force. A better metaphor for international communication might be one of 'guardrails' that keep us on roughly the right track during interaction: 'relatively stable "norms of minimal intelligibility" that enable our understanding of one another, that serve as "guardrails" against misunderstanding' (Cooper 2008: 51, citing Derrida 1988: 147) Because of the redundancy that exists in all languages, combined with the processing capabilities of human beings, the guardrails are set pretty wide. In terms of intelligibility, there is considerable tolerance of variation.

Conclusion: the uses and abuses of 'intelligibility'

The main point of the above section is that a practice-based view of language need not deny the role of 'system' or 'function', and that 'intelligibility' can also be seen as an aspect of practice. If functional factors, including measures of functional load, appear to at least partially explain the findings of intelligibility studies – as was claimed above – then they deserve further consideration, without falling into the trap of looking for 'universal' explanations. The systematic aspects of language need not be seen as antithetical to agency or creativity, although practice-based and poststructuralist viewpoints alert us to the dangers of buying into 'underlying systems', or ignoring the configurations of power that lie behind 'recurring patterns'.

Seen in this way, the concept of intelligibility has several uses and applications in studies of global English. First, it has a role to play in the overall theorization of global English interactions. Acknowledging intelligibility means acknowledging the ideational functions of English (Seargeant 2009), and recognizing that there are acts of intelligibility which shape language use, in addition to acts of identity. But this need not be seen as relentlessly centripetal and 'centring'; intelligibility arguably helps to enable, rather than stifle, creativity in global English. New lexical items, such as the innovative *prepone* found in India, are more likely to be comprehensible if they are also intelligible, and as such are more likely to enter the repertoires of other speakers. A low-proficiency speaker in Hong Kong might pronounce this word [pipoʊn] with initial consonant cluster reduction – for the listener, reconstruction using sound-spelling relationships and morphological clues is made difficult by such reduction.

It must be emphasized that while the functional basis of intelligibility suggests that speakers tend to converge on recurring features and contrasts, this does not mean they have to be pronounced in exactly the same way – only in ways that enable listeners to make use of them. Acknowledging the importance of intelligibility still allows for a great deal of accent variation, and functional load merely indicates some of the constraints that apply to variation in general. From the 'functional' and frequency-based perspective on phonology taken by Bybee (2001), phonemes are not fixed entities so much as emergent categories built up in the minds of speakers

in much the same way that other categories are built up – on the basis of factors such as frequency in the input (see also Ellis 2002). This perspective sees language as having both cognitive and social aspects. It can accommodate the observed effects of stability, while also allowing for change and patterns of local stabilization; it is therefore compatible with practice-based views of language.

Second, in terms of pedagogical application, the theoretical basis of intelligibility reinforces what is known as the 'intelligibility principle' in pronunciation teaching; this is explored in more detail in the following chapter. Briefly, it does this by allowing for the prioritization of important features and contrasts in instruction, simultaneously avoiding the unnecessary correction of non-problematic phenomena. For example, an initial indication of the 'broad' sense of functional load is that 'dropping' consonants is likely to cause more problems than substituting them; a Hong Kong speaker who pronounces *five* as [faɪ] will probably face more intelligibility problems than he or she would with [faɪf]. In the discourse of global English, intelligibility has played an important role in the debate about pronunciation models. The following chapter examines the debate in more detail, as well as making a general case for the importance of intelligibility in language use.

Before leaving the topic of intelligibility it is also necessary to consider the possible abuses of the term. The main one appears to be that 'intelligibility' might be applied in a mechanical fashion to pronunciation teaching and assessment. Although it is capable of contributing to the formulation of general guidelines – as will take place in Chapter 8 – it should not be applied in a rigid manner. Different speakers, and different populations of users, have different responses to the demands of intelligibility. The *distraction/ destruction* example suggests that sometimes there is no point insisting on the production of certain contrasts, even if they have a high functional load: the costs of acquiring them probably exceed the benefits, and it is overall intelligibility that matters. As the model of accent variation presented in the next chapter will make clear, intelligibility is but one of the many factors that influence learning and interaction.

A more general objection to 'intelligibility' is that it has a hidden ideological agenda. Bourdieu (2000: 65) downplays the notion that intelligibility is the aim of communication, and argues instead that 'cognitive interests are rooted in strategic or instrumental social interests'. In other words, both the *what* and the *why* of intelligibility are ideological matters. In terms of the former, although even Derrida (1988: 147) is prepared to acknowledge the existence of 'minimal norms of intelligibility', he is quick to add that they are not 'absolute and ahistorical, but merely more stable than others'. As for the *why* of intelligibility, there is a danger that if we unquestioningly admit 'intelligibility' into our theorizing about global English, we are also admitting several related assumptions. According to Grice's (1975) conversational maxim of *manner*, and under Grice's overarching cooperative principle, participants in conversation should avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity, while striving for brevity and order (Bowe and Martin 2007: 10). But these are not universal maxims or principles; they are particular, culture-bound ways of thinking about communication. Their relevance can be acknowledged without them being universalized.

Placing intelligibility in a position of prominence tends to prioritize the idea of rapid, efficient communication. For bell hooks (1994) the demand for instant intelligibility can get out of hand, and leads to unreasonable demands being placed upon speakers. An obsession with 'intelligibility' reflects an underlying assumption that we should transact our business as quickly as possible:

> I suggest that we do not necessarily need to hear and know what is stated in its entirety, that we do not need to 'master' or conquer the narrative as a whole, that we may know in fragments. I suggest that we may learn from spaces of silence as well as spaces of speech, that in the patient act of listening to another tongue we may subvert that culture of capitalist frenzy and consumption that demands all desire must be satisfied immediately.
>
> (hooks 1994: 259)

In a similar vein, Crary (2013) comments on the texture and tempo of late capitalism, including the prevalence of technological interfaces in contemporary life. He notes the requirement, under conditions of late capitalism, to engage in 'mandatory communication' (Crary 2013: 72). In this environment, communication comes to be associated with efficiency and rapidity; there is an 'intrinsic functional requirement continually to reduce the time of any exchange or operation' (Crary 2013: 58). As the *de facto* language of globalization, English and the ways in which it is taught are vulnerable to the charge that they are Trojan horses of global capitalism, carrying particular ideas about the nature of communication. Rather than imposing 'efficiency' on language learners through the uncritical adoption of 'intelligibility' as a criterion, there must be an acknowledgement of the importance of patient listening, and a rejection of unfounded beliefs about the origins of intelligibility problems. It is not always the case that native speakers, or 'proficient' speakers defined in conventional terms, are more intelligible. Despite the existence of common factors and centripetal influences, intelligibility remains largely situation-specific. Speakers and listeners both have roles to play in establishing intelligibility. We should remain open to the possibility that teaching people how to listen will do more for international communication than teaching them how to speak.

Notes

1 Cutler's (2005) computations suggest that the misperception of /l/ as /r/ is more likely to activate competitor words than the misperception of /r/ as /l/ – perhaps explaining why the pronunciation of *black* caused confusion.
2 I follow Munro and Derwing (2006) by classifying as 'high' those contrasts ranked from 6 to 10 in Brown (1991a), and from 51% to 100% in Catford (1987).
3 One can apply the same principle to contrasts that have mainly been lost in 'native speaker' accents. In much of the UK, few speakers now make a distinction between *which* and *witch,* and *poor* sounds like *pore*. In other words, the [ʍ] sound has mainly been lost, and the /ʊə, ɔ:/ contrast is becoming less common. But they still have functional load, and the likelihood of problems arising can be partly assessed by measurements of it; in these cases, it is extremely low.

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5 Teaching English pronunciation

The models debate

The previous chapter focused on the role of accent and pronunciation features in communication, and identified some of the factors affecting intelligibility in global English interactions. We now need to find out how accent and pronunciation are conceptualized in language pedagogy, by examining past and current approaches to the teaching of English pronunciation. Pronunciation teaching is a site and activity in which encounters between various factors – local and global, systematic and emergent, linguistic and sociolinguistic – are played out in concrete terms. This chapter begins by outlining the history of pronunciation teaching in order to arrive at a clearer picture of its current status. The challenges posed by global English, and some of the pedagogical responses, are then examined via a summary of what I have called the 'models debate'. This provides useful pointers for pedagogy, but also creates a vantage point for metastudy: the discursive construction of 'models' illustrates key aspects of wider global English debates. The key contention of this chapter is that rather than relying on models, context-specific and flexible evaluation of the content of pronunciation teaching and testing in terms of phonological *features* is required. The chapter makes the case for an integrated approach involving the consideration of both linguistic and sociolinguistic factors. These factors are depicted in the form of a conceptual model of accent variation, one that also serves as a framework for the prioritization of phonological features in teaching and testing.

A short history of pronunciation teaching

What does the teaching of pronunciation involve, and how has it changed over time? Tracing its development reveals how pedagogical approaches reflect changing understandings of language, communication, and the status of English in the world. The following account is based on Howatt and Widdowson's (2004) survey of the history of language teaching, from which it can be seen that pronunciation has fallen in and out of favour. Early approaches, such as the grammar translation method, gave almost no attention to pronunciation. There was little terminology for the sounds of languages, compared to the resources for grammar and the general study of written language.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the 'discovery' of the phoneme occurred in a climate of increasing interest in scientific approaches to various disciplines. The Reform Movement in language teaching arose in this climate, and gained much of its energy from a conviction that traditional methods of language teaching needed to change. Pronunciation then came to the forefront as the movement developed in Europe. Figures such as Wilhelm Vietor, Henry Sweet, Paul Passy and Otto Jespersen helped to establish phonetics as a field of study, but much of the initial impetus was pedagogical. Passy developed a set of symbols to assist with the teaching of foreign languages, and set up a Phonetic Teachers' Association in 1886. In 1897 this became L'Association Phonétique Internationale, known in English as the IPA. On the one hand, the public appetite for all things scientific contributed to the Reform Movement's success, but there was also a strong commitment to making phonetics accessible. Passy was a committed teacher with Christian and socialist leanings, and saw phonetics as something that would contribute to better human understanding (Collins and Mees 1998: 174). He found himself more aligned with the practical orientation taking shape in Britain at the time and was greatly influenced by Henry Sweet – the 'founding genius' of applied linguistics, according to Howatt and Widdowson (2004: 200).

The close relationship between phonetics and pronunciation teaching was to have a decisive influence on language teaching in general. As Cook (2008: 4) points out: 'One of the keynotes of the nineteenth-century revolution in teaching was the emphasis on the spoken language, partly because many of its advocates were phoneticians.' Apart from raising the profile of pronunciation and establishing phonetics as one of the essential components of teacher education, the Reform Movement helped to enshrine the 'primacy of speech' in language teaching. Developing at around the same time as the movement, the Direct Method also maintained an emphasis on repetition and conversation in the developing English Language Teaching (ELT) profession. Later approaches such as audiolingualism combined these elements in different ways from the 1940s onwards. The use of minimal pairs – word pairs that differ by only one sound in the same position, such as *man* and *men* – was one characteristic of the audiolingual method. According to Celce-Murcia *et al*. (2010: 5) this was due to the influence of structural linguistics, but the concept of the phoneme as a minimally contrastive unit had in fact been touched upon by Sweet in the 1890s (Howatt and Widdowson 2004: 203), and by Daniel Jones in the 1920s.

Few English learners today have heard of Daniel Jones (1881–1967), but many will have seen his legacy in the form of the letters 'DJ' next to the phonetic transcriptions found in some electronic and online dictionaries. Jones was a student of mathematics when he took courses at the Marburg Language Institute in the winter of 1900–1. His contact with the Reform Movement ignited his interest in phonetics, and by 1905 he was attending Passy's lectures at the Sorbonne in Paris (Collins and Mees 1998: 85). Jones would have a lasting influence on the teaching of pronunciation, and arguably upon the way words are pronounced in global English, mainly through his transcription system: type a word such as 'phonetics'

followed by 'definition' into Google and there is a phonemic transcription that is little different to Jones's original version, even after the passage of a century. The *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, first published by Jones in 1917, is now in its 18th edition (Roach *et al*. 2011) and its system of transcription is still widely used across many forms of electronic and print media. Jones's influence is also seen in the 'RP' (Received Pronunciation) model label, used by Jones in the 1924/1926 edition of the *Pronouncing Dictionary*. The label persists in the minds of many English learners around the globe, even though the accent it represents has become an endangered species.

I will consider RP, pronunciation models and the nature of Jones's symbols in more detail later in this chapter, but to return to the historical narrative for the time being: the Chomskyan revolution of the 1960s did not leave language teaching untouched, especially in the United States. Pronunciation fell out of favour with the Cognitive Approach; grammar and vocabulary were seen as more amenable to rule-governed analysis (Celce-Murcia 2010: 5). On the other hand, Chomsky's (1966) advice to language teachers was that there was little in either psychology or linguistics that they could accept on faith. This had the effect of releasing language teaching from an 'intellectual leash' (Howatt and Widdowson 2004: 333) and led to the exploration of alternative, 'humanistic' methods such as the Silent Way and Community Language Learning, each with their own approaches to pronunciation. The Cuisenaire rods and Fidel charts of the former school lent themselves to the systematic teaching of contrasts, stress patterns and sound/spelling relationships.

The transitional period of the late 1960s and early 1970s was also marked by the rejection of behaviourism and a preference for 'meaningful' language use (Howatt and Widdowson 2004: 318). Hymes's (1972) notion of communicative competence, which became the motto of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), had mixed effects on pronunciation teaching. The emphasis on meaningful interaction turned it away from the kinds of pattern practice and minimal pair drills that had often made the 'language lab' session tedious. One response was to ignore pronunciation altogether, on the grounds that if students were communicating in English they were automatically 'doing pronunciation' (Kenworthy 1987: 113). The inherent eclecticism of CLT meant that many techniques and activities from previous eras were retained in pronunciation teaching syllabi. The list given by Celce-Murcia (2010: 9–10) includes some associated with the Direct Method, such as listen and imitate, others brought forward from the Reform Movement and the structuralist era, such as minimal pair practice, and CLT-influenced variants such as contextualized minimal pairs. Kenworthy's (1987) approach for general ELT involved integrating pronunciation into other classroom activities, drawing attention to it as and when necessary.

Task-based language teaching (e.g. Prabhu 1987) tended to place a lower priority on pronunciation, or at least move it towards the 'integrated' approach outlined by Kenworthy. Pronunciation drills were relegated to the category of 'non-communicative' activities, and associated with a focus on *forms*, rather than the desirable focus on *form*. This has the sense of 'form' being treated incidentally during communicative activity, rather than being explicitly pre-taught, and has

been advocated by task-based researchers such as Long (2000). Given that task-based teaching places the communicative task at the centre of classroom learning, and that these tend not to *require* the use of particular features of pronunciation, it seems likely that pronunciation will be addressed according to the teacher's preference – or not addressed at all, in many cases, since pronunciation is often seen as a difficult or technical area. Kelly (1969) famously described pronunciation as being the Cinderella of language teaching, neglected and passed over in favour of more easily accessible aspects of language.

Another trend within CLT from the 1980s onwards was the move towards discourse and longer patterns of text. Activities such as reading passages aloud (Celce-Murcia 2010: 9–10) tend to emphasize the teaching of suprasegmental features, including sentence stress and intonation, over segmental (vowel and consonant) features. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the segmental/suprasegmental debate permeated pronunciation teaching from the 1970s onwards. Suprasegmentals gained the upper hand in many cases, despite there being mixed research evidence concerning their effects on intelligibility. Current positions on the segmental/suprasegmental issue acknowledge their interdependence, but studies of English as a Lingua Franca (e.g. Jenkins 2000) appear to be moving the pendulum back towards segmental features. This is based on the view that many so-called 'native-speaker' suprasegmental features, such as weak forms, are in fact unnecessary for international intelligibility (Jenkins 2000).

Current approaches to pronunciation teaching

Current approaches to the teaching of pronunciation reflect changing perspectives on the nature of English under globalization. The research paradigms of WE and ELF have their own views, as was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2; this chapter and Chapter 6 will continue to evaluate these paradigms. But the re-evaluation of pronunciation teaching also raises questions about the nature of English language teaching, or ELT, itself. We can start to appreciate the contested and controversial status of pronunciation teaching through the figure of Henry Sweet (1845–1912). Despite the 'genius' label bestowed by applied linguists such as Howatt and Widdowson, Sweet has also been portrayed as the inspiration for George Bernard Shaw's Professor Higgins character (Pennycook 1994: 128–9); in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Higgins is the 'perfectionist pronunciation teacher' (Howatt and Widdowson 2004: 200). In his critique of 'imperialist' tendencies in ELT, Pennycook (1994: 128) links linguistics with 'fierce nationalism' and accuses Sweet of planning to train teachers to 'spread their perfectly enunciated English'.

Combine this with the fact that Daniel Jones's symbols and the 'RP' accent model the were to represent are still in wide circulation, and pronunciation teaching is faced with a challenge. Can it be done without encouraging homogeneity, without perpetuating the hegemony of native-speaker norms, and without referring learners to an accent that almost nobody speaks? I will consider the 'model' problem later in this chapter, and will argue that systems of transcription

need not be associated with particular accents. But to deal with Pennycook's criticism of Sweet first of all; as is argued by Howatt and Widdowson (2004: 200), the charge of perfectionism seems rather unfair from a reading of Sweet's work, especially after making allowances for the nineteenth-century viewpoint. Sweet was one of the first to admit the possibility of non-native speakers being better teachers of English: 'for teaching Germans English, a phonetically trained German is far superior to an untrained Englishman' (Sweet 1884: 583, cited in Howatt and Widdowson 2004: 209). Sweet had a realistic approach to teaching and highlighted the importance of 'significant sound-distinctions', those on which 'distinctions of meaning depend' (Sweet 1899 [1964]: 18).

Not all sounds are equally important, in other words, and here we can see the beginning of a pragmatic current that continues via Abercrombie's (1949: 120) 'comfortable intelligibility' all the way to the 'intelligibility principle' of Levis (2005). This has always competed to some extent with its conservative cousin, the nativeness principle (Levis 2005). While the nativeness principle affirms native-speaker pronunciation targets for second-language learners, the intelligibility principle holds that intelligibility (rather than accentedness) is a more realistic target for pronunciation teaching. Rather than trying to make students sound like native speakers, the goal of pronunciation teaching is to enable them to be understood in a variety of contexts and styles. Pronunciation teaching under the intelligibility principle does not therefore mean spreading 'perfectly enunciated English', nor is it reliant on native-speaker models.

However, Pennycook's underlying criticism is one of phonocentrism, which he defines as 'the insistence on the primacy of speech over writing' (Pennycook 1994: 122). This is a more serious charge for advocates of pronunciation teaching, for two main reasons. First, at a conceptual level phonocentrism has the effect of naturalizing speech in a way that overlooks its social and cultural origins. Adding a further strand to the arguments put forward in Chapter 4 for influence of written language, we cannot assume that spoken language is independent of cultural innovations such as writing. The advent of writing 'fundamentally changed the nature of language, society and culture' (Pennycook 1994: 123). This is also the argument put forward by the phonologist Port (2007: 359), who refers to Faber (1992: 117) in this regard: 'segmentation ability as a human skill may have been a direct result of (rather than an impetus to) the Greek development of alphabetic writing'. Knowing the letters affects how we hear (and 'see') the stream of sounds.

In this light, we are faced with the irony of the Reform Movement having *appeared* to enshrine the primacy of speech in language teaching, when in fact the segmental descriptions of Daniel Jones and other phoneticians were strongly influenced by *written* language. I have already argued in Chapter 4 that the 'functional' or systematic aspects of intelligibility are partly a result of the 'anchoring' effects of written language. In the case of pronunciation teaching, Pennycook's criticism of the 'naturalization' of speech can thus be turned against itself, to some extent: the teaching of pronunciation is also the teaching of written language. As Pennycook (1994: 123) acknowledges, Derrida's (1974) interrogation of the speech/writing hierarchy is not intended to invert it by

advocating the 'primacy of writing', but rather to deconstruct it: we see that speech is 'more similar to writing than it is to speech as traditionally conceived' (Cooper 2008: 46). If speech and writing are interdependent, and if literacy is widespread, then the intelligibility of spoken language partly depends on its ability to evoke written forms – especially when there is significant ambiguity. What the Ugandan speaker is doing in the *distraction/destruction* example in Chapter 4 is relying on his or her knowledge of spelling, in other words 'seeing' the word in order to repronounce it in an alternative, non-standard manner. This strategy assumes that the interlocutor is also familiar with the written form.[1]

Second, and perhaps more importantly, phonocentrism may have the important pedagogical effect of 'trivializing' both the learners and the learning process (Pennycook 1994: 136). This is perhaps a more serious indictment of traditional pronunciation teaching, and evidence of it is provided by the classroom observations of Doerr (2009). This ethnographic study of an ESL (English as a Second Language) class in the US provides a rare insight into what goes on in such classrooms, revealing the nature of certain kinds of pronunciation teaching. One must bear in mind, however, that the ESL context is usually associated with the nativeness principle rather than the intelligibility principle; it does not represent the whole of pronunciation teaching. Over the course of several months, Doerr observed an ESL class with eighteen students from a variety of backgrounds. She reports that the teacher 'often corrected the students' pronunciation' (2009: 194), and focuses on the example of a student who pronounced the word *through* as 'srough' – in the language of Chapter 3, a substitution of the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ with [s], something which is often associated with Japanese learners. The student was 'corrected' in three ways: by overt signalling (the teacher said 'NO! Through, through, through'), by class repetition of the correct form, and by metalinguistic commentary on how to make the correct sound (the teacher said 'I want to see your tongue'; Doerr 2009: 194).

This approach to pronunciation teaching is described as 'a currently accepted method of teaching in ESL' (Doerr 2009: 195). But as well as being characteristic of ESL in its 'immigrant training' guise, with all its political undertones of assimilation, it is best seen as an example of the traditional approach under the 'nativeness' principle. We can gain some idea of this approach from the teaching guide and course book by Celce-Murcia *et al.* (2010). It covers the *how* in great detail – there are chapters on the relationship between pronunciation and other aspects of the curriculum, on testing and evaluation, and on sound/ spelling relationships – but almost nowhere is the *what* critically examined: this is provided by the pre-given 'sound system' of North American English 'as spoken in the United States and Canada' (2010: 35). This reflects the structuralist view of language-as-system and the ESL, integrational approach to pronunciation teaching. The approach addresses both segmental and suprasegmental features, and orients itself towards both intelligibility and accentedness. In practice it is more closely aligned with the nativeness principle than with the intelligibility principle, however: its goal is to help people to 'fit in to' the prevailing normative landscape. As Doerr's observation suggests, many of the pronunciation 'problems'

picked up by the nativeness principle are not necessarily problems, when seen from the perspectives of intelligibility and functional load.

From the standpoint of the intelligibility principle, the classroom approach described by Doerr might well be seen as insensitive, demotivating and misdirected. It is insensitive because of the manner of the intervention; there are other ways to draw attention to pronunciation, which must always be seen as a sensitive matter. Apart from causing embarrassment, it is demotivating because it underestimates the complexity of this acquisitional 'problem', consigning it to a mechanical matter of repetition and correct tongue positioning. It is probably misdirected because dental fricative substitutions are generally unlikely to cause communication problems, as indicated by the consideration of functional load and intelligibility in Chapter 4. I have no desire to criticize teachers whose knowledge of the 'social milieu' far exceeds mine, but I should also make my position clear and point out that my encounters with the nativeness principle in foreign language learning have left me with a strong aversion to it. Some may claim that it empowers learners by enabling them to 'fit in', but it is often a matter of empowering teachers – many people feel comfortable teaching something in which they are the undisputed experts in terms of knowledge and performance, and in which learners will consistently fall short of their expertise.

Of course, prevailing ideologies of language, most notably standard language ideology, also sustain the credibility and appeal of the nativeness principle. We can see from the teacher's approach, and from Doerr's interpretation of it, that general questions of 'what to teach' and 'how to teach it' are framed by ideological perceptions of the wider social milieu and of learners' places and roles in it. The teacher's approach is influenced by the perceived need for learners to 'fit in' and avoid drawing attention to their origins, even though they may in fact be perfectly intelligible. As mentioned above, this approach can be defended on 'empowerment' grounds: it may enable learners to avoid or reduce accent-related discrimination. Similarly, the intelligibility principle can be criticized on the basis that intelligibility is not enough, because in the real-world milieu there are people – influential gatekeepers among them – who read far more into 'accent' than mere intelligibility (as mentioned in Chapter 3). The classroom approach depends on the needs of the learners, although this is becoming increasingly difficult to predict. In the model developed later in this chapter, and in the recommendations for Hong Kong in Chapter 8, I will return to this important issue in more detail. For now it is sufficient to note that the intelligibility principle need not stop at intelligibility – additional features can be addressed in classroom work, but often need to be treated in ways that explore their sociolinguistic effects with the learners.

Doerr's interpretation of classroom events is influenced by Pennycook's criticisms of phonocentrism, and its 'trivializing' tendencies are certainly visible in this case. But to claim that the 'primacy of speech' aimed at 'standardization' and 'the elimination of accents' (Doerr 2009: 195) is questionable. Pronunciation teaching under the intelligibility principle accommodates a certain amount of accent variation, and does not involve standardization. One would therefore expect

to find the intelligibility principle being used in many global English settings, such as English classes in the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle countries. In practice, the extent to which the nativeness and intelligibility principles are interpreted and combined depends on a variety of factors, and it is often difficult to establish what is actually going on in classroom settings. At first sight, surveys of pronunciation teaching from EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts appear to show that a 'nativeness' orientation also forms the mainstay of curricula. For example, the English Pronunciation Teaching in Europe Survey investigated the 'norms or models of English used by teachers and those preferred by learners' (Henderson 2013: 131). The survey found that British 'RP' and American 'GA' (General American) were preferred in both receptive and productive work.

These and similar findings are often highlighted in debates about pronunciation teaching, because they appear to suggest that the nativeness principle is dominant. As the next section will show, claims of 'Anglo-American' domination often form a rhetorical springboard from which alternative 'models' can be launched. But it is vital to be clear about what these labels actually mean in practice. Henderson's survey adopts the problematic 'variety' construct, meaning that teachers were required to choose from pre-given entities such as 'Canadian English', 'Welsh English' and 'International English'. As discussed earlier, the problem with these labels is that they are the largely the constructs of linguists rather than of language users. So the survey respondents' choice of RP and GA does not necessarily mean that learners are being mainly exposed to these accents; it may simply mean that teachers are more familiar with these labels than others, as a result of teacher training and linguistic descriptions. They may also see the labels as cover terms for the kinds of 'British' and 'American' accents found in the media – accents which nowadays show an enormous amount of variation and hybridity.

In addition, a 'variety' is not the same as a 'model', as Henderson's survey implies. The third most frequent response to Henderson's survey question, after British and American English, was 'a type of International English' (Henderson 2013: 132). But as Seidlhofer (2003: 8, cited in Henderson 2013: 132) notes, there is no variety called International English; thus, it cannot form a model. The same thing arguably applies to other presumed entities defined in nation-state terms. As the debate about pronunciation teaching and global English largely revolves around 'models', it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the term.

Pronunciation models: labels and realities

We can perhaps distinguish between two senses of 'model'. First, in a narrow sense, it is 'the accent presented for imitation' (Brown 1991: 39). In the narrowest of narrow senses, the 'model' refers to the recorded materials used in specialized pronunciation teaching, in which case it will often adopt a form of RP (e.g. Roach 2010) or GA (e.g. Celce-Murcia *et al*. 2010). But in a slightly broader sense, the teacher's own accent forms a model when they offer correction or guidance (as in the example provided by Doerr 2009). This starts to take the model away from the

RP/GA labels, as in most cases it is unlikely that the teacher actually has an RP or GA accent, or – in the case of the European teachers surveyed by Henderson – a British or American accent in more general terms. It also broadens the scope and definition of 'model' to that of *input*. The teacher's accent and the accents of other students in the classroom also form part of classroom input. Under conditions of globalization, the input that students receive goes far beyond the classroom, and cannot be captured by simplistic variety or model labels.

The students in Henderson's survey do not seem to care about sounding British or American: only four out of 111 teachers surveyed indicated that their learners wanted to sound '100% native'. None of the teachers from Finland, Ireland, Spain or Switzerland (83 out of 111 respondents) thought that their students wanted to sound native or even near-native (Henderson 2013: 127). Among the other interesting findings of the survey, 65 per cent of teachers thought that their students were 'frequently' or 'sometimes' exposed to subtitled TV programmes, and only 13 per cent indicated that they were *not* exposed to news channels such as the BBC and CNN. So – and as will be further argued for Hong Kong later in the book – the idea that students are mainly exposed to 'local' varieties or models is becoming less tenable with the increasing prevalence of globally distributed media and communications. Even on British and American channels such as the BBC and CNN there is a wide range of accents – very few broadcasters now speak RP in the traditional sense. There is an increasing number of English news channels such as Al Jazeera and Russia Today, also featuring a range of accents and reflecting some of the diversity of global English. Although the classroom remains an important site for the acquisition of English, and although local teachers are an important source of input, they are not the only source of input. Whatever 'variety' or accent the teacher has, it will be one amongst many, both local and international, that the students are exposed to – depending of course on their ability and motivation to gain access to these linguistic resources. Similarly, if there are activities dedicated to pronunciation, they usually form a small part of the overall input.

In summary, when survey respondents in accent studies state a preference for 'RP' or 'GA', I do not think they have the actual, phonetically and phonologically defined accents in mind. Neither do these accents dominate pronunciation teaching to the extent that is sometimes assumed. The labels are often likely to be interpreted as representing *qualities* such as standardness, correctness, authenticity and so on, as suggested by the discussion of indexicality in Chapter 2. In many cases, respondents may not understand what is meant by the alternatives; as Kirkpatrick (2006: 72) points out, these models are seen as the 'safe' option. But on the other hand, it would of course be naïve to ignore the ideological construction and force of these labels. Teacher training courses often refer to these labels, if only because materials aimed at teaching English phonetics and phonology also tend to rely on them.

A certain amount of deconstruction of the labels, as well as of the models they are claimed to represent, is therefore required. The discussion of intelligibility and functional load in Chapter 4 suggests that the pedagogical value of such

descriptions lies not in the precise qualities of the sounds, but in the system of contrasts that they represent. If we focus on contrasts, rather than on the way particular sounds are realized, the Daniel Jones system used in many dictionaries and pronunciation teaching materials starts to look less like a description of RP and more like a list of phonemic contrasts, the majority of which are held in common with other accents of English. In pedagogical terms, drawing reference points from a set of symbols does not – or should not – mean insisting on precise realizations. The intelligibility principle and the functional perspective remind us that phonemic categories can be realized in a variety of ways; it is mainly omission and substitution that cause problems. Underhill (1994) suggests using a phonemic chart for pronunciation teaching, one that is clearly based on the Daniel Jones system. But even though Underhill's approach mainly predates WE, ELF and other manifestations of global English, he makes it clear that it is not accent that is being taught: '[w]here the target for learners is a modified RP or a different accent the symbols can be changed or given different values' (Underhill 1994: p. xi). The symbols are merely a means to the end of emphasizing the importance of contrast: '[i]t is sounds that are being taught, not symbols' (Underhill 1994: p. x).

However, to reflect the diversity of global English and to fully acknowledge the intelligibility principle we really need to come up with alternative ways to depict these contrasts. This would avoid what Benson (2001) calls the 'ethnocentrism' of the dictionary – in this case, the impression that native speakers are the possessors of the language and therefore the best models in terms of intelligibility. For example, there seems to be no reason to require the use of the weak vowel /ə/ in the unstressed syllable of words like *pronounce* (/prəˈnaʊns/ in many citation forms), as long as the word stress pattern is maintained. Even for native speakers, the degree of vowel reduction depends on factors such as speech rate, and on stylistic or identity positioning (e.g. careful *versus* relaxed). It is also an indication of the speakers' judgment of the audience and of his or her relationship with it; although a reduced vowel is unnecessary, too full a vowel might be seen as pedantic in some contexts. The description of such a system of notation lies in the future, but dictionaries could at least try to reflect the fact that words have more than one possible pronunciation – without going into too much unnecessary detail.

The models debate

The important questions arising from the above discussion seem to be: does pronunciation teaching still need a model, in the narrow sense? If we accept that 'input' is incredibly diverse, what criteria can we apply to the selection of materials or the prioritization of features in teaching or testing? Can the intelligibility principle be applied, and if so how? If we start to see intelligibility in terms of reasonably accommodating 'guardrails', what general guidelines are there for teachers and learners in diverse contexts? In adapting pedagogy to global English, the focus could perhaps shift to the *goal*, rather than the model – what constitutes acceptable learner performance? At the same time, the criteria for the goal will affect certain aspects of what is seen as desirable input, for example in

the form of recorded materials or the teacher's accent. It is vital that the criteria or goals do not set up a divide between 'ideal' and reality, and it was for this reason that Brown (1991: 40) advocated the 'educated local pronunciation of the teacher' as both the model *and* the goal of instruction.

This remains a desirable state of affairs, and it is one that potentially establishes the intelligibility principle, rather than the nativeness principle, in language and pronunciation teaching. However, there needs to be a critical awareness of terms such as 'local' – as mentioned in Chapter 2, we cannot rely on simplistic descriptions of 'local' varieties. And as noted in the previous discussion of intelligibility, we need to move beyond traditional concepts of varieties – whether British or American, idealized 'local', or reified 'International English' – and adopt *features* as the units of analysis. Most probably, what students need in receptive terms is exposure to a wide variety of accents. But guidelines of some kind are still needed, especially for early-stage learning. These guidelines need to reflect the sociolinguistic context, as well as incorporating linguistic elements. This section will look at how pronunciation models have been approached in the context of wider debates about global English.

The tension between 'traditional' approaches to pronunciation teaching and more sociolinguistically informed ones, such as those indicated by WE and ELF, has led to vigorous debate. Despite the complexities of interaction and usage in global English, approaches to accent and pronunciation teaching in global English still tend to revolve around 'models', often closely allied with 'varieties': 'native' versus 'non-native', 'local' versus 'international' or 'lingua franca'. There are pedagogical insights to be gained, but from a metatheoretical standpoint the models debate also offers a fascinating insight into the way models and varieties are discursively constructed and deployed upon the ideological terrain.

In his consideration of models of English for the classroom, Kirkpatrick (2006: 73) evaluates three possibilities: native-speaker, local or 'nativized', and lingua franca. The last two are more or less coterminous with the WE and ELF schools of thought. Kirkpatrick is here referring to models in the general sense of 'orientations', but the arguments are also applicable to pronunciation models. Again, the nature and prevalence of the native-speaker model is somewhat taken for granted, rather than being investigated in particular contexts of use. As a general orientation towards the models debate, it is important to remember that 'models' serve as vehicles for other concerns, attractors for a range of attributes that create an indexical field around the 'model' labels. As we have started to observe in the previous section, the actual contents of such models need to be carefully unpacked.

So although Kirkpatrick's first option is the 'native-speaker' model, it is not quite certain what this actually involves in terms of classroom activities or materials. Kirkpatrick (2006: 72) gives several general reasons for the dominance of so-called native-speaker models: they are codified and have literary presence; they are seen as representing a transnational 'standard' by politicians and bureaucrats; they represent power in the form of media, publishing and language teaching interests; and they have historical authority. For these and other reasons, a native-

speaker model is the default choice, the 'easy' or 'safe' option (Kirkpatrick 2006: 72). It may not be 'easy' for those affected by the choice, however: teachers who are non-native speakers and students (apart from those who wish to 'converse with native speakers and to understand whichever native-speaking culture it is they are interested in'; Kirkpatrick 2006: 73).

These are convincing reasons, but the distinction between 'native' and 'non-native' set up by invoking a 'native-speaker model' oversimplifies the complexity of the linguistic and sociolinguistic factors involved. We have to ask what 'native speaker' orientations involve in terms of teaching and testing, and whether they are actually orientations towards something else, such as the general concept of standard language. Furthermore, in descriptive terms it is often difficult to decide whether linguistic features are 'native' or 'non-native' – so-called 'native speaker' forms may be adapted or appropriated for local purposes. In the accent school story presented in Chapter 1, the Hong Kong speaker expresses a preference for 'British English', while speaking with a Hong Kong accent – is this evidence of a native-speaker orientation, or does it suggest locally generated identity moves of distinction, as outlined in Chapter 3? A more sophisticated approach acknowledging the complex interaction of the 'local' and 'global' is required.

Questions of power are also oversimplified in this description of 'native-speaker' models. Power is not only manifested from above or 'outside', but also from 'below' or inside. Kirkpatrick (2006) notes that the adoption of native-speaker models is advantageous for native-speaker teachers, but neglects another reason for the dominance of native-speaker models: many non-native-speaker teachers enjoy a comparative advantage over their students in terms of their ability to *approximate* native-speaker or 'standard' pronunciation, and they may be among the most enthusiastic upholders of an idealized native-speaker norm. The fact that they do not, in many cases, employ these norms (Brown 1991: 33) is immaterial. Again, standard language ideology can be seen as the largely *internal* cause here, rather than the imposition of an external model: standard language ideology is not only associated with English, which may therefore be the wrong target of attempts to reform educational practices. As will be seen in Chapter 6, standard language ideology tends to be pervasive in both educational and social terms.

Local models

Turning to Kirkpatrick's second option, a 'nativized' or local model (such as Singapore English or Hong Kong English) is claimed to have several advantages. These include the provision of a relevant and attainable model which is also the 'target standard', as in Brown's (1991) collapsing of the model/goal distinction. The codification of a local standard is seen to assist the empowerment of local teachers, who may otherwise feel inferior to imported native-speaker teachers (Kirkpatrick 2006: 76). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the main obstacles to the development of local models include the rather problematic assumption that a 'local' variety can be easily defined. The identification of a 'standard' based on

educated speakers, as suggested by Bamgbose (1998) and Schneider (2011), is likely to increase perceived legitimacy within existing social structures. However, it is also likely to result in a local model that is not substantially different from other varieties; as Mesthrie (2004: 1099) observes, the educated or 'acrolectal' forms of such varieties tend to be close to so-called 'target language' norms, and are therefore quite similar across different countries. The scalar perspective of Blommaert (2010) suggests that there may in fact be more difference *within* nation-states than between them. As a result, local speakers may still find it difficult to acquire the features of 'educated' or 'standard' versions of local varieties. The 'more easily attainable' argument has not been subject to empirical scrutiny, and it is not particularly convincing.

An oversimplified distinction between the global and the local is visible in these and similar arguments, one in which the latter is excessively valorized: '[t]exts based on a "global" Standard English would no longer be the key texts: texts based on local cultures would be' (Kirkpatrick 2006: 76). We should first be careful to distinguish between language and content; there is no reason why 'local' topics cannot be discussed using a local standard. While useful for the purposes of consciousness-raising, one problem with the 'local/global' oppositional strategy is that a fixation on 'local' cultures ignores the importance of the perceived mobility potential of English (Blommaert 2010). Local users (or their parents) may reject the apparent restriction to local scale-levels, and imagined communities do not have natural boundaries. There must of course be some recognition of local cultures and local conditions of learning, but not in a way that assumes the 'local' can be hermetically sealed off from the wider context.

The construction of the local/global polarity in the metalinguistic discourse of the models debate reflects the identity processes of adequation and distinction, outlined in Chapter 3. As Train (2009) notes from his historical investigations of the discursive construction of languages, these processes exploit language variation in order to link territory with identity. This is the general WE problem of the variety-community mapping: a discrete variety mapped onto a distinct community, despite the fact that such mappings look increasingly outdated and are probably symptoms of 'sociolinguistic nostalgia' (Bucholtz 2003).

The World Englishes approach to local varieties and local models is perhaps best seen as the result of two main influences. First there is a kind of residual structuralism, which tends to see surface regularities as evidence of a common 'underlying' system (e.g. Hung 2000, in the case of Hong Kong English phonology). This is not to say that local pronunciation features are irrelevant, only that their status as part of a distinct 'system' should not be exaggerated. Second, in pursuit of the activist goals of the WE approach, there is strategic essentialism (Spivak 1987). Bucholtz (2003: 400) notes that the ideology of essentialism involves two related assumptions: groups can be clearly delimited; and group members are more or less alike. Strategic essentialism is thus the employment of these ideologies for strategic purposes (here, the valorization of a local language variety). It can be seen as employing the identity processes of adequation and distinction, introduced in Chapter 3: there is an attempt to pursue identity claims by emphasizing internal

cohesion and downplaying diversity (adequation), simultaneously differentiating the group from other groups (distinction). But proposals for local models come up against the problem that such variety-community mappings no longer resemble the sociolinguistic territory under conditions of super-diversity. In addition, the voices of local users are often absent from these identity moves (see Arnaut 2005). One has to bear in mind that pronunciation models – often relatively empty of content, in terms of significant differences – are also vehicles for other concerns.

Lingua franca models and ELF

To avoid the problems of excessive localization, and perhaps deal with the limited flexibility and mobility that users may associate with such localization, a lingua franca (or ELF) approach – Kirkpatrick's (2006) third and preferred option – looks promising. In essence, the lingua franca approach means orienting pronunciation teaching towards the intelligibility principle rather than the nativeness principle – regardless of whether we see 'nativeness' as residing in native-speaker models or in local 'nativized' ones, as both are seen as too restrictive. In keeping with its focus on the international uses of English, a lingua franca approach draws on both corpus-based descriptions of language use and studies of intelligibility in order to make the case for a realistic and communicatively viable model. Intelligibility provides a possible solution to the error/feature problem: recurring aspects of pronunciation that do not cause intelligibility problems can be legitimized as features. Corpus data represent a range of naturally-occurring global English interactions, lending the lingua franca approach an 'international communication' orientation and making it more attractive to local language planners and policy-makers.

The initial step in such an approach is to identify what speakers from different backgrounds have 'in common', especially in terms of features that do not appear to cause communication problems. Kirkpatrick (2010: 80) provides a list of the phonological features of 'ASEAN ELF'; these include final consonant cluster reduction (pronouncing *first* as *firs*), substitution of the voiceless TH sound /θ/ with [t], the merging of long/short vowel contrasts such as /ɪ/ and /iː/, and a general absence of vowel reduction. As Kirkpatrick (2010: 80) points out, most of these features would not be expected to reduce intelligibility. This is further indicated by evaluating the features using the LFC criteria and by applying the principles of functional load (as outlined in Chapter 4). As with the LFC, this helps to secure the legitimacy of the features in terms of their potential acceptability in pedagogical contexts. But – and as with the LFC – the list of 'distinctive' features is not particularly distinctive. As has frequently been observed, these and similar lists also include features found in many kinds of English, such as consonant cluster reduction and dental fricative substitution; these are also found in so-called native-speaker varieties. If the list were used to develop priorities for pronunciation teaching it would not constitute much of a change; the majority of the features and contrasts of existing models would still be necessary.

The fact that these unproblematic 'ELF' features appear widely in global English interactions is a result of two main factors, it is argued here. First, in

the temporal frame of learning, they reflect the absence or substitution of certain 'standard' features, ones that present acquisitional problems in terms of being marked or otherwise difficult. Second, in the temporal frame of interaction, most of them do not interfere with intelligibility, so speakers do not experience problems in communication. This also means that the 'ELF' features will not even be noticed, much of the time. To use an evolutionary metaphor, the combined effect of these two factors is that these features 'survive' in speakers' repertoires, and become 'norms' in the statistical sense of the term. Some of the features may also survive (and thrive) because they perform identity functions, for example by allowing speakers to avoid sounding too 'native-like' or 'careful'.

As noted in Chapter 2, ELF research differs from WE in that it has moved away from a preoccupation with codifying such features, or suggesting that they represent a variety of English. One reason for this is that not all speakers use these features, or they may only use them on some occasions. However, and as in WE, these similarities tend to provide the subject matter for processes of adequation and distinction in ELF discourse: the presence of shared, non-standard features is taken to suggest that 'an ELF variety is developing' (Kirkpatrick 2010: 85). At this point the pendulum swings rather rapidly from 'emergence' – in the sense of non-finality, of relative unpredictability – and towards systematicity in the form of a bounded variety. In an earlier article on the subject of 'ASEAN ELF', Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006: 394) point out that they do not wish to suggest 'that a completely uniform variety of English is emerging in the region'. The ASEAN region includes a vast number of languages and cultures, even within member states, and this eventuality seems extremely unlikely.

Nevertheless, the very act of drawing boundaries around a set of linguistic phenomena by naming it seems to encourage the reification of a variety. In the same article it is asserted that 'new English lingua francas are emerging', that 'a number of distinct local varieties are emerging', and furthermore that there are pronunciation features associated with 'an English lingua franca that is emerging in the ten countries belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)' (Deterding and Kirkpatrick 2006: 391, 392). The persistence of the traditional variety/community nexus is clear in these moves: there exists a demarcated group of people, such as ASEAN residents, who use a language variety that is characterized by its features. The emphasis on 'shared' features suggests some kind of consensus within the group (this is the 'adequation' aspect of variety formation), although at this point the difference between norms in a statistical sense and in an evaluative sense becomes relevant; Parakrama (1995: 185) observes that 'competent users … cannot agree about such standards and examples'.

As noted in Chapter 3, the discursive processes of adequation are inseparable from those of distinction, and ELF research has often been interpreted as demonstrating that non-native speakers are using different, distinctive forms of pronunciation. Cook's (2011) assertion that 'the phonology of ELF is different to that of native English' is true insofar as we accept the containment implied by the ELF label; the phonology of non-native speakers is of course different, but then the phonology of *any* group must necessarily differ from that of any other group,

once we abandon the idea of common underlying systems. There is both residual structuralism and strategic essentialism in the suggestion that the surface features indicate some kind of underlying, group-based, alternative 'system'. While the overt 'system' orientation of ELF research has decreased, the age-old process of associating linguistic distinctiveness with an assumed community reflects the activist goals of both ELF and WE.

What the above discussion of lingua franca models shows is that while the features of ELF pronunciation models are mainly uncontroversial, and while there are strong arguments for acknowledging them in pronunciation teaching, the discourse surrounding the models is marked by contradiction. The main reason for this is that by entering a language-ideological landscape which is seen to be dominated by 'native speaker' or 'standard language' orientations, ELF researchers have little choice but to create a distinct linguistic entity that is capable of competing on the ideological terrain. The contradictions arise because while boundary-drawing is necessary to give ELF a distinct identity – ELF versus non-ELF – there is little convincing basis for these boundaries in terms of either linguistic features or sociolinguistic attributes. The appeal to a nascent community of 'ELF speakers' demonstrates the contradiction of 'community': if the boundaries are set too narrowly or precisely there is a danger of excluding large parts of the spectrum of language use or language users, but if they are set too widely then the concept ceases to have any meaning at all, and it cannot form a focus for identity or activism.

Another reason for the excessive polarization of the models debate is that strategic essentialism involves endowing models with indexical qualities: intelligible, attainable, relevant, contemporary and so on. This is of course justifiable on strictly pedagogical grounds. But what is striking about the models debate is that the indexical field becomes subject to massive expansion, encompassing far more than pedagogical issues. A prominent example is Kirkpatrick's (2006: 76) contention that choosing a nativized (local) model over a native speaker model represents 'the choice of democracy over imperialism'. These indexical associations are part of the persuasive apparatus of strategic essentialism, to be sure. But they also reveal how the metalinguistic discourse in which they are embedded is subject to a kind of metaphorical transfer, one in which the desired qualities of the social order – independent, locally determined, free of unwanted cultural baggage – comes to be projected onto the linguistic order, with either 'local varieties' or 'lingua franca models' gaining symbolic sovereignty.

As noted in Chapter 1, the concept of verbal hygiene (Cameron 1995) is probably the best way of understanding this process. Verbal hygiene is not simply a synonym for prescriptivism, but captures the underlying process by which the linguistic order comes to serve as a metaphor or metonym for the desired social order. As Harpham (2002: 65) observes, language often becomes 'a proxy for other issues that resist resolution on their own terms'. Part of the appeal of ELF is that it appears to offer a vision of English that has been freed from its undesirable colonialist and imperialist connotations, in which case the questions of its distinctiveness and of the nature of its boundaries may not matter very

much: what is more important for the time being is what the concept represents in terms of its indexical associations. In the following chapter I will look at strategic essentialism in the context of Hong Kong English, and argue that it may be time to move beyond the contradictions it generates.

The models debate is thus not only about accent and pronunciation features, but also involves what these features represent in wider terms. But we still need to ask: is there such a thing as a 'lingua franca model'? As we have seen, ELF research has some useful feature-based indications, which I will draw upon in later chapters. But in terms of its application to pronunciation teaching, ELF is probably best seen as an approach that continues and develops the long-standing intelligibility principle. Although strategic essentialism leads to an emphasis on 'systematic' features, ELF research also emphasizes 'emergence' and unpredictability, and highlights the need for strategies and processes to deal with this. In its empirical aspects, ELF research offers some valuable insights into the nature of communication in global English. These insights are relevant for both native and non-native speakers, in 'local' and international settings.

Understanding 'accent', evaluating 'pronunciation'

After reviewing the models debate, the orientation towards pronunciation teaching that is emerging here can be summarized as follows: language use under conditions of globalization indicates the limitations of 'models', however they are defined. We can acknowledge the 'local' by drawing on features-based descriptive studies in the WE tradition, combining them with what is known about L2 acquisition and avoiding the temptation to reify a 'local model'. Similarly, ELF research can provide important insights into the nature of interaction and intelligibility, but the findings should not be taken as evidence of the emergence of a 'lingua franca' in the sense of a language variety.

Shifting the focus from 'variety' to *variation* also suggests that students need to be exposed to a wide range of accents. Students' own pronunciation must be assessed in a way that avoids treating every departure from an unanalysed 'model' as an error in need of correction. The difficulty of predicting learners' needs suggests an emphasis on process and on strategies; language users need to be able to cope with the different situations they find themselves in. In the longer term, these considerations point towards a radically reconceived view of 'competence', one that focuses on students' ability to perform appropriate tasks rather than reproduce the features of a pre-existing linguistic system or model (Hall 2013: 227).

But at the same time, the interaction of 'emergence' and 'systematicity' discussed in Chapter 4 suggests the relevance of an approach that acknowledges recurring features, and which is guided by the intelligibility principle. This in turn requires some way of prioritizing features and contrasts. In fact, two things seem to be needed here. First, as I have argued throughout the book, we need to understand the milieu in which teaching takes place. This has 'external' and 'internal' aspects. There are external contexts of use, which can be predicted to some extent. But

Linguistic factors

Quadrant 1

- L1/L2 differences

Quadrant 2

- Intelligibility and functional load

Individual perspective

Social perspective

Quadrant 3

- Identity

Quadrant 4

- Normativity and acceptability

Sociolinguistic factors
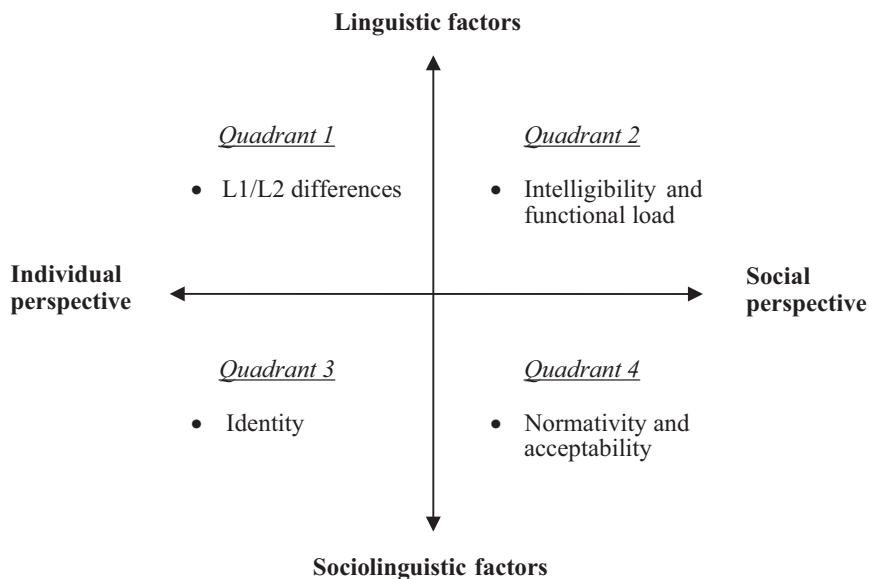
Figure 5.1 The four-quadrant model of accent variation

internal orientations towards these contexts, for example those related to identity, also form part of the milieu of teaching. We therefore need to *understand* accent variation in a general sense, in terms of how it arises and how it relates to factors such as intelligibility and identity. Second, we also need to be able to *evaluate* variation when necessary – for example, when identifying priorities for teaching or testing pronunciation. Figure 5.1 shows a framework that has two applications: to facilitate an understanding of accent variation by grounding this in certain principles of language use; and to guide pedagogy by allowing for the evaluation of pronunciation features and the drawing up of priorities or guidelines.

The two intersecting axes represent important conceptual and analytical dimensions, and serve to locate relevant areas of interest within them. The vertical axis runs between the poles of linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives, partly to recognize the contributions offered by descriptive and cognitive orientations towards language, as well as those from sociolinguistic and sociocultural approaches. It is intersected by a horizontal axis consisting of an individual/social dimension, encouraging the recognition of identity as a significant factor in language learning but avoiding excessive concern with either individual 'freedom' or social 'constraint' in description and explanation. As Layder (1994: 209) notes, 'it is perfectly feasible to talk of the independent properties of individuals as long as they are understood to have an organic connection with social processes'. This polarity accords with a practice-based view of dynamic interaction between individual and social, micro and macro levels, and reflects the discussion of identity in Chapter 3.

As such, the framework encapsulates two main foci of this book, the sociolinguistic and pedagogical factors pertaining to accent and pronunciation in

global English. As is usually the case, the diagram and the approach should not be taken to involve binary oppositions or impermeable boundaries. It rather serves as a heuristic device, an aid to problem solving and a way of encouraging multiple perspectives while recognizing their interrelatedness. I should perhaps follow the example of Wenger (1998: 15), who employs a somewhat similar diagram in his explication of 'communities of practice'; he points out that he is not attempting either a 'grandiose synthesis' of intellectual traditions or a resolution of the debates reflected by the different areas. In Chapter 7, I will use the framework to present different kinds of data relating to accent and pronunciation in Hong Kong, without any suggestion that the data fully represent each quadrant, or form a complete picture of what is going on.

As a dynamic representation of acquisitional processes within a language user, and as a way to facilitate the understanding of accent variation, the diagram can be interpreted in the following way. Although the process is described here in sequential fashion, there is no necessary order to them; all are likely to work together at some point, and the polarities and quadrants can be seen as representing different analytical perspectives on these interrelated processes.

- Quadrant 1 (linguistic factors, from an individual perspective): the acquisition of L2 accent features and the development of L2 phonology are affected by L1/L2 differences, forming a partial explanation of why some features are acquired more easily than others, and other features are avoided altogether.
- Quadrant 2 (linguistic factors, from a social perspective): language use affects awareness of accent features, it is argued here, by encouraging the 'noticing' of features that are frequent, participate in important contrasts, or are otherwise salient. This quadrant therefore has intelligibility within its concerns, and reflects the functional and frequency-based approach of Bybee (2001; introduced in Chapter 4).
- Quadrant 3 (sociolinguistic factors, from an individual perspective): individual orientations towards the L2 in general, or towards specific groups or identity positions, affect the acquisition and use of accent features. Both positive and negative orientations are possible (wanting to sound like particular people or groups, real or imagined, local or translocal, or *not* wanting to sound like them). The identity processes discussed in Chapter 3 give some idea of what may be involved. This quadrant interacts with quadrants 1 and 2, but not all speakers will be able to sound like their preferred groups.
- Quadrant 4 (sociolinguistic factors, from a social perspective): individual orientations are affected by prevailing patterns of normativity, with certain accent features or types tending to be viewed as more or less acceptable in different contexts. As mentioned in Chapter 2, normative influences may arise from the individual's *actual* participation in groups (such as classrooms or workplaces), or from his or her identification with *imagined* groups and communities (see Ryan and Irie 2014). The interaction of quadrants 3 and 4 thus reflects 'an attempt to understand the person as formed through complex relations of mutual constitution between individuals and groups'

(Wenger 1998: 13). Language ideology plays an important role in this mutual constitution, as outlined in Chapter 2.

Viewing the four areas as being sequential may assist, however, in visualizing the trajectories of L2 learners or understanding the differences that present themselves in a classroom – or in any other group, for that matter. In reality, all of the quadrants interact at any one time, and the difference between them is partly a difference of analytical focus and partly a result of applying different temporal frames. Along with learning and interaction, one might introduce the temporal frame of 'system' (see Elder-Vass 2012). The relationship between quadrants 1 and 2 occurs in the temporal frames of system, learning and interaction. The system aspect is that from an individual perspective, L1/L2 differences often create predictable 'starting points' for learners at different proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced learners are usually quite different, as predicted by the discussion of acquisitional pathways in Chapter 3. The 'learning' and 'interaction' aspects are that the acquisition of L2 pronunciation features is influenced by communicative interaction, modifying the individual 'system' or repertoire that exists at any one time.

The relationship between quadrants 3 and 4 is similar; it involves spatial scale as well as temporality. Quadrant 3 reminds us that individual identity orientations have an effect on both language learning and language use. Quadrant 4 represents the patterns of normativity that affect individuals, the multiple 'centres' implied by polycentricity (outlined in Chapter 2). Each centre involves different evaluations of 'better' and 'worse', and patterns of acceptability vary accordingly. The relationship is mutually constitutive, as individual 'acts of identity' both reflect and affect patterns of normativity. Taking a more macro perspective, the additional temporal frame of 'language change' can be seen as arising from the way all four quadrants and their associated factors interact over longer periods of time. Thus, and as suggested by the practice-based view, the four-quadrant model tries to depict the constant interplay between different analytical and temporal frames: between the individual and the social, between the linguistic and the sociolinguistic, between existing systematic aspects and their emergent deployment and development.

As a guide to the evaluation of pronunciation – the development of feature-specific guidelines for teaching and testing – the diagram is intended to be interpreted in the following way: each quadrant represents a different perspective on the prioritization of features. In deciding whether a particular feature or contrast is likely to be important in a particular teaching context, evidence from each of the quadrants may be useful. For example, in deciding whether substitutions of the dental fricative or TH sounds should be accepted, the following arguments present themselves:

- Quadrant 1: dental fricatives are generally difficult to acquire as they exist in few languages. They tend to appear late in childhood language acquisition. Substitutions occur widely in L1 and L2 accents, but are subject to both inter- and intra-speaker variation.

- Quadrant 2: the available evidence suggests that while contexts for their use occur frequently, dental fricatives have a low functional load and do not play an important role in intelligibility. Substitutions are therefore likely to persist as the kind of 'permanent fixtures' to which Jenkins (2000: 109) refers.
- Quadrant 3: assuming that they can perceive them, individuals may come to associate dental fricatives and their substitutions with groups, in geographic and social terms, and with stances. They thus become available for 'acts of identity'; for example, in the US substitutions of /ð/ with [d] may index toughness (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 297). It is worth reminding ourselves that identity does not have to be construed in terms of noticeable difference; apparent 'reproduction' may involve a variety of nuances for those who are attuned to them.
- Quadrant 4: individual patterns of use are affected by patterns of normativity, the actual or imagined norms of groups to which the individual belongs or identifies with. Identifications and alignments are in turn affected by power relations and ideologies of language, such as standard language ideology. Decisions about teaching need to acknowledge the influence of these prevailing norms and ideologies, while also recognizing the role of teaching in creating and maintaining these norms.

The four-quadrant approach has the advantage of emphasizing the interdependence of various factors. Some of the interactions between stages or levels should already be apparent: contexts for dental fricatives are widespread and thus frequent in terms of input; in second or additional language contexts dental fricatives may be difficult to acquire and are often substituted (quadrant 1). Their low functional load means that 'intelligibility effects' do not encourage acquisition (quadrant 2); alternative realizations of dental fricatives persist by default, or become available for identity work in converging or diverging directions (quadrant 3). Patterns of usage by individuals and groups affect perceptions of social meaning (quadrant 4), further affecting patterns of usage, and so on.

From this brief consideration of the dental fricatives, it can be seen that one of the crucial questions for pedagogy arises from the interaction of quadrants 3 and 4: which norms, or patterns of normativity, should teaching reflect? This is a very complex matter, but the least we can say for the time being is that critical awareness of patterns of normativity is needed, in both teaching and learning. The 'standard' cannot be seen as pre-given, but questions of power and ideology cannot be ignored. Given the complexity of normative landscapes in the contemporary world, it may be necessary to provide students with metalinguistic knowledge, and with strategies for negotiating patterns of normativity (see Gee 2012). Flexibility and adaptability appear to be the keywords. The following two chapters provide a context-specific exploration of the possibilities and constraints: Chapter 6 includes an overview of ideologies of language in Hong Kong, while Chapter 7 presents accent-related data from the Hong Kong context, following the framework of the four-quadrant model.

Note

1   There has been an upsurge of research interest in the relationship between orthographic knowledge and the perception, production and acquisition of language. Bassetti *et al.* (2015) note that while assumptions of the separateness of spoken and written language have long dominated both research and teaching, it is increasingly realized that speech and writing represent 'closely related, and often complementary, systems' (Katamba 2005: 221).

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6 English in Hong Kong

The sociolinguistic soundscape

As well as 'linguistic landscapes' (see, e.g. Landry and Bourhis 1997), there are also 'soundscapes' in which the sounds of different languages and accents create aural effects (Graddol 2013: 78). The concepts are useful in that they can provide an initial impression of a particular setting, something that this chapter seeks to do in the case of Hong Kong. But taken at face value, they may make the terrain appear flat in ideological terms. Understanding the soundscape involves considering not only the presence and effects of languages and accents, but also the reasons for people's attitudes and reactions towards them, and the sociohistorical conditions that have led to the current situation. Language ideologies are therefore a prominent theme of this chapter. It begins with a brief characterization of Hong Kong's sociolinguistic profile, including the roles of English, its relationship with other languages, and its links with identity. It then discusses some of the relevant ideologies of language: standard language, linguistic purity and falling standards. These are considered 'relevant' because they directly affect the conditions under which English is taught and learned, and must be taken into account when making pedagogical recommendations.

Elaborating on the theme of ideology, issues of accent and pronunciation are then foregrounded by examining what Luk and Lin (2006: 13) call 'accent-based linguistic hierarchization' in Hong Kong: according to this viewpoint, English accents are implicated in educational and social stratification. Luk and Lin suggest that a pedagogical interpretation of the WE approach in the areas of assessment, research and curriculum may provide a partial solution to the problems of hierarchization. Some of the limitations of the WE approach were identified in Chapters 2 and 5, and the current chapter will illustrate these by examining scholarly discourse relating to 'Hong Kong English'. This adds another layer to the understanding of 'accent' by focusing on the role it has played in the discursive process of constructing a local variety of English. Attitude surveys, descriptive studies and attempts at codification are examined, and the chapter ends with a further analysis of strategic essentialism in WE discourse.

The sociolinguistic profile of English in Hong Kong

There are a number of factors that make Hong Kong somewhat unusual in terms of its sociolinguistic profile. It by no means represents a 'typical' postcolonial situation. Although it has technically been a postcolonial society since the 1997 return of sovereignty to China, the transition was not the result of internal struggle and the emergence of national identity. There is thus a significant difference, in sociohistorical and political terms, from the countries usually assigned to the Outer Circle, such as Singapore and India. This makes the status of English somewhat difficult to assess via such models as the evolutionary or dynamic approach of Schneider (2003); this is predicated on the relationship between language and a sense of emerging national identity.

Another important difference exists in terms of its linguistic ecology (Mühlhäusler 1996), the ways in which English coexists with other languages and achieves possible functional differentiation. Although English is an official language along with Chinese, the vast majority of the Chinese community speaks Cantonese (Evans 2011: 294). This means that there are few 'natural' functions for English, such as enabling intra-ethnic communication. In recent years Mandarin Chinese (also known as Putonghua) has gained increasing prominence in the linguistic ecology, while leaving the importance of Cantonese relatively untouched; it is the language of 'inner' values such as 'tradition, home and solidarity' (Pennington 1998: 13).

English is thus something of a paradox in Hong Kong. It is widely promoted as the guarantor of Hong Kong's participation in the regional and global economy. It forms the medium of instruction in many secondary schools and in much of higher education (Poon 2010). But it is not certain how this relates to actual patterns of language use, or to people's everyday needs. In some ways English appears to be losing ground, in the face of the growing importance of Putonghua and the staunch local attachment to Cantonese. On the other hand, it is still used widely in business, government and the civil service. A survey conducted by Evans (2011: 304) found that English was widely used in written communication, and that formal situations such as job interviews were likely to involve the use of spoken English – even among Cantonese-speaking professionals.

This suggests two things of relevance here. First, English often has formal uses and indexicalities. Second, English performs gatekeeping functions by controlling access to certain positions of privilege. This in turn reveals the symbolic function of English in Hong Kong: it serves as a locally recognized indicator of educational level, international exposure and other polarities of the indexical field surrounding its use. To some extent, the indexicalities of English and other languages pertain to the languages *in general*; according to Pennington (1998: 13) English is associated with 'outer' values such as 'success, stylishness and academic achievement'. But the symbolic functions of English use also suggest that the *type* of English used – including the accent, or accent features – will have some importance. As the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 suggests, English is closely bound up with social stratification and with the construction of identity within this stratified space.

Further insights into the role of English in identity construction can be gained by considering the complex nature of 'national identity' in Hong Kong. As noted in Chapter 3, large-scale demographic categories such as nationality form part of the spectrum of influences on identity and language use. Two years after the resumption of sovereignty by the People's Republic of China in 1997, the University of Hong Kong began conducting a twice-yearly survey of Hong Kong residents' orientations towards various regionally defined identity categories. In 2013 the most popular choice was 'Hongkonger' (35 per cent), with 'Chinese' gaining 22 per cent. The survey findings are normally interpreted as showing a growing sense of 'local' identity in contradistinction with a wider 'Chinese' one. As one newspaper article put it, 'Hongkongers' sense of Chinese identity has fallen to a 14-year low' (Lo 2013).

The meanings of categories such as 'Hongkonger' and 'Chinese', 'local' and 'translocal' are contested and increasingly hard to define, but an overall sense of identity being in some way conflicted emerges in these and other studies; So (2012) considers the data and speaks of an 'identity crisis'. Shortly after the handover, Mathews and Lui (2001: 305) conducted similar research and pointed to a conflict between 'belonging to a particular state and belonging to the global cultural supermarket'. The latter can be linked to a strong vein of cosmopolitanism, partly explained by the relative absence of training in 'national' sentiment:

> unlike people almost everywhere else in the world, Hong Kong people have not until very recently been trained to feel that they belong to a state. Until 1 July 1997, Hong Kong was one of the world's last and wealthiest colonies, a colony of a distant country toward which most in Hong Kong felt little national sentiment.
>
> (Mathews and Lui 2001: 291)

As one would expect from Hong Kong's history as a city of flow and migration, as the 'gateway to China', there have always been 'global' aspects to the 'local' identity. Ashcroft's (2009: 13) discussion of 'postcolonial hope' raises the possibility that English in Hong Kong may be seen as an affordance for 'cosmopolitan utopianism', an attempt to transcend the nation-state and realize the 'liberating potential of difference and movement'. But this can also be interpreted as an aspect of 'local' identity. Although it is often associated with 'tension' – as in the 'I want my accent back' story in Chapter 1 – the sense of 'divided' identity is not necessarily a problem, at either individual or collective levels. Divided identity is a universal aspect of human experience, one that exists at different spatiotemporal levels: self/other, family/tribe, tradition/modernity and so on, with various psychological, cultural and political processes arising to effect partial reconciliation. Hong Kong, with its unusual sociohistorical factors and its exposure to the currents of globalization, presents an interesting example of the possibilities for multiple and transnational identities – identities that may conflict, however, with nation-state imperatives for unity, cohesiveness and distinction. The 'problem' of divided identity, of an identity 'crisis', is partly a matter of perspective.

As noted in Chapter 3, however, we should not lose sight of the fact that the ability to adopt identity positions largely depends on having access to the right kinds of linguistic resources. It is not enough just to 'speak English' – the type of English matters in terms of its indexical and identity-related functions. Illustrating the links between accent and identity in Hong Kong, and the simultaneity of 'local' and 'global' influences, Luk and Lin (2006: 15) speculate that part of the Hong Kong identity is to speak English with a 'standard' or prestigious accent. If we see English as a source of linguistic capital that affects people's life chances and mobility potential, we can also see that English education – including pronunciation teaching – forms part of a wider, highly stratified social milieu.

English in education

There are thus a number of sociohistorical and identity-related factors that complicate the nature and role of English in Hong Kong. Linking these issues to the domain of education, Glenwright (2005: 206) notes that 'the position of English in Hong Kong society and its implications for identity and education represent a particularly contentious and divisive issue'. Decisions and policies in the field of education, including in the seemingly insignificant field of pronunciation teaching, have to be understood in terms of the wider social setting.

As an initial approach to the topic of English and education, the medium of instruction (MOI) debate illustrates the relationship between language, education and the wider societal context, and helps us to understand the origins of the current situation. After the various stages of MOI policy in Hong Kong (see Evans 2000; Lee 2005; Poon 2010), English has regained its dominant position. To explain the resilience of English, one might first turn towards 'linguistic imperialism' and regard it as a colonial or Anglophone imposition, but there is little evidence for this in Hong Kong. If there was a top-down determinant of the race towards English, it could be argued that it lay in the colonial government doing too little, too late, to restore the balance in favour of Chinese-medium education (Poon 2010). Hong Kong experienced dramatic socioeconomic changes during the postwar period. As a result of immigration, the population expanded from around 600,000 in 1945 to 4.9 million in 1979 (Lee 1981: 257). There was rapid economic development and internationalization, and horizons of opportunity widened. People came to regard an English-medium education as 'the principal determinant of upward and outward mobility' (So 1992, in Evans 2000: 188). As the number of schools increased, most took advantage of the government's 'laissez faire' attitude and designated themselves as English-medium to cater for the demand of the public (Poon 2010: 30).

As Morrison and Lui (2000: 483) observe in their article on the MOI issue, the principle of structuration (introduced in Chapter 2) may be useful here, as it provides a more nuanced account of agency and structure. It seems pointless to ask what came first: the demand for English-medium education or the provision of it, occurring as they did in a socioeconomic climate of increased opportunity and competition for resources. Whatever one's position as to its origins, some aspects

of the dominance of English-medium education can be captured by the notion of linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991). Morrison and Lui (2000: 473) define linguistic capital as: 'fluency in, and comfort with, a high-status, world-wide language which is used by groups who possess economic, social, cultural and political power and status in local and global society'. The reference to 'comfort' draws attention to the elusive 'embodied' aspect of linguistic capital. Bourdieu (1991: 84) notes that 'relaxation in tension' can only be acquired through prolonged familiarity with markets that are characterized by control and the 'stylization of life'; this may be particularly relevant to accent. Once acquired, linguistic capital can be converted into economic capital, depending on the value assigned to it in particular situations. Participants at different micro- and meso-levels – students, parents, schools, employers – all play their part in the process, under the aegis of macro-level economic and political factors. From a practice-based viewpoint, we might say that participants align themselves with English through their actions and practices, and this comes to exert a structuring effect on further activity.

While not sufficient in itself, as Morrison and Lui (2000: 483) acknowledge, the principle of structuration and a capital-based approach offer superior explanatory power to a linguistic imperialism perspective. The latter would imply the existence of significant agency at governmental and supragovernmental, transnational levels. As Morrison and Lui (2000: 472) observe, this suggests that populations consist of 'cultural dupes or passive puppets'. The linguistic capital approach also predicts the development of a stratified and segmented market, one in which new indexical associations and values are constantly generated. For example, if access to English is increased through a compulsory education policy, the value of 'standardized' linguistic capital *qua* individual possession would be expected to decrease. One might then expect the appearance of differentiated values attached to the type of English used; this is where accent and pronunciation become particularly relevant. In his introduction to Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, Thompson (1991: 18) explains how this occurs via the concept of a 'profit of distinction':

> [D]ifferences in terms of accent, grammar and vocabulary … are indices of the social positions of speakers and reflections of the quantities of linguistic capital (and other capital) which they possess. The more linguistic capital that speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit the system of differences to their advantage and thereby secure a *profit of distinction*. For the forms of expression which receive the greatest value and secure the greatest profit are those which are most unequally distributed, both in the sense that the conditions for the acquisition of the capacity to produce them are restricted and in the sense that the expressions themselves are relatively rare on the markets where they appear.

Whether we are seeking to understand the dominance of English in education or the stratification of the linguistic market in terms of different accents, it would be naïve to over-emphasize the degree of agency or choice involved, or to neglect

the role played by ideologies of language. Another perspective on 'choice' is provided by Li (2002), who asks whether Hong Kong people are 'passive victims of imperialism' or 'active agents of pragmatism' in terms of the race towards English. Li (2002: 50) prefers the latter position, explaining the race as the pursuit of a 'value-adding commodity'. However, commenting on this position, Luk and Lin (2006) suggest that:

> A pragmatic self-pursuit of English seems to be a personal choice on the surface, but may indeed be a self-naturalized uncritical acceptance of linguistic control under the coercive force of state apparatuses.
>
> (Luk and Lin 2006: 14)

This viewpoint suggests the influence of Althusser's (1971) approach to ideology and its ideological 'state apparatuses', which include the educational system. In order to understand attitudes towards English in Hong Kong, some understanding of the relationship between language and ideology is necessary.

Language and ideology in Hong Kong

Language ideology is 'a fundamental key for understanding how language and society intersect with and constitute each other' (Park 2009: 13). It affects the way people frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and 'map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them' (Gal and Irvine 1995: 970). These conceptual frameworks can be called ideologies because 'they are suffused with the political and moral issues pervading the particular sociolinguistic field, and because they are subject to the interests of their bearers' social position' (Gal and Irvine 1995: 971). Awareness of these ideologies is needed for theoretical and practical purposes, to obtain a more detailed picture of the local language environment and gain awareness of the constraints on change. Whatever aspect of accent and pronunciation we are interested in – from attitudes towards accents, to teaching practices and testing procedures – there are specific aspects of language ideology that must be taken into account. In Chapter 2 I gave an outline of the general importance of ideology in language use, and Chapter 3 examined the role of language ideology in standardization processes. Here I will first examine some of the specific language ideologies that pertain to the Hong Kong environment.

Standard language ideology

Lippi-Green (2012: 67) defines standard language ideology (henceforth, SLI) as 'a bias towards an abstracted, idealized, homogenized language'. The issue of SLI is important here because, as I have indicated in Chapters 2 and 5, the discourses of World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca tend to set up a polarity between 'native speaker' or 'standard' language use on the one hand, and 'local' or 'lingua franca' language use on the other. However, I will argue in

this chapter that the situation may be more profitably understood as involving a general orientation towards 'standard' language, one that provides the 'local' with standard/non-standard polarities of its own. This suggests, among other things, that the orientation towards standard language is an ideology of local origins. It is an aspect of language ideology that strongly affects attitudes towards language – especially accent – and beliefs about the way language should be taught.

A sense of the importance of standard language is apparent in metalinguistic discourse in Hong Kong. Poon (2010: 56) recounts the example of an English examination question which took as its subject a contemporary form of Cantonese known locally as 'trendy language'. Even though the language extracts were presumably framed by standard written English, the question was 'severely criticized' by many candidates and teachers, who thought that it would promote 'bad language' (Poon 2010). Whether it occurs in Cantonese or English, it seems that any perceived departure from an idealized 'standard' creates a fear of contamination and disorder. In Chapter 5 I introduced the concept of verbal hygiene (Cameron 1995) in the context of wider debates about global English. The effects and origins of SLI can be seen as aspects of verbal hygiene: concerns about language are actually concerns about wider, societal issues such as collective identity, orderliness and morality. Thus in the debate about pedagogical grammar and 'falling standards' that took place in the UK in the 1980s, a Member of Parliament was motivated to state that:

> If you allow standards to slip to the stage where good English is no better than bad English, where people turn up filthy at school … all these things tend to cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards then there's no imperative to stay out of crime.
>
> (Norman Tebbit MP, 1985, in Cameron 1995: 94)

The connection between 'bad English', 'turning up filthy at school' and the inevitable descent into a life of crime must have been self-evident to this influential politician; Cameron (1995: 94) believes such associations are common, regardless of political allegiance. Linguists should not underestimate the power and influence of such beliefs, and Cameron (1995: 229) draws attention to the undesirable situation of 'mutual distrust between experts reluctant to speak to lay concerns and lay speakers with no interest in listening to linguists'. The strategic point here is that if we are trying to make pedagogical recommendations using 'rational' arguments about intelligibility and the inevitability of variation, we need to avoid activating ideological schemata that posit a link between variation and various negativities: disunity, carelessness, moral laxity, or the spectre of communication breakdown.

Linguistic purity

Another manifestation of language ideology can be seen in the set of beliefs relating to 'linguistic purity'. This is particularly relevant here because it tends to

work against the incorporation of 'local' elements into the teaching and learning of English. In metalinguistic discourse such as letters to the local English-language newspaper, the ideology of linguistic purity often takes the form of an antagonism towards 'mixed' language:

> Too many young people are using a kind of cocktail language in which they mix Chinese and English words. Their career prospects will suffer if they do not have a good command of both languages. People simply will not understand someone talking in this way.
>
> (Mau 2013)

The use of the term 'cocktail' echoes the pejoration of Malaysian-English codemixing as 'rojak': this has the general meaning of 'mixed', but is commonly used to refer to a kind of salad (Kirkpatrick 2008: 33). In this form of metaphorical or metonymic projection, the whole is definitely less than the sum of its parts. The combination of 'pure' and 'original' ingredients results in a transient and ultimately frivolous 'cocktail': the indexical values of a Singapore Sling, perhaps.

More seriously, 'mixing' is also perceived as a threat to the ideologically sustained language planning that underpins many multi-ethnic societies. In Malaysia, mixed language (or 'bahasa rojak') has been 'banned from national TV stations, labeled as "undisciplined" language use and deemed a threat to the national language and national identity' (Abu Bakar 2009: 100). In Singapore, the colloquial form of Singapore English (known as Singlish) has also been the target of eradication campaigns, with television programmes facing similar restrictions (Vittachi 2010: 221). The explicit concern in Singapore seems to be that Singlish is a threat to international intelligibility and the attractiveness of Singapore as a hub for international business, but the prejudice against 'mixing' is powerful – especially when it is performed by non-elite members of society. For a number of reasons, government officials tend to adhere to traditional views of languages as discrete and ahistorical entities, far more aligned with the 'universals of mind' than 'the specifics of culture' (Rampton 2009: 702).

What should be of greater concern for linguists is that even in the case of the economic arguments for an internationally intelligible standard, language users are assumed to be unable to handle the difference between 'local' and 'global' forms of English – without oversimplifying the distinction, the latter will tend to emphasize international intelligibility and comprehensibility. Switching between the different forms is likely to become second nature for many, if there is a need for it. The pedagogical solution would be to make variation in form and function part of the English curriculum, but this would carry the danger of activating two ideological schemata – purity and standard language – at the same time. The 'Speak Good English' movement in Singapore (see Bruthiaux 2010) can be seen as combining these ideologies: insofar as 'good English' is equated with 'standard Singaporean English' it reflects SLI, and the antagonism towards 'bad English' (with noticeable local influences) reflects a concern with linguistic purity.

The combination of SLI and linguistic purity also means that 'good' English is likely to be identified with 'pure English'; presumably, speaking English with Cantonese-influenced accent features would also be seen as a 'cocktail' by the letter-writer above. Although discourses of linguistic purity are often associated with nation-building claims of unity and historical continuity, there is little evidence of this in Hong Kong. The preference for purity can therefore be tentatively related to various concerns. There may be aesthetic preferences for 'authenticity', for example, along with other ideologically influenced beliefs about the boundedness of languages and the qualities that are associated with them and their speakers. Strategically, it may therefore be difficult to convince people that English spoken with an intelligible but Cantonese-influenced accent is 'good English', rather than just 'non-pure' or 'mixed' (and therefore bad) English. Data pertaining to intelligibility form a useful, 'rational' counter-argument, but such beliefs tend to be deeply entrenched.

Falling standards

In Hong Kong, the long-running 'falling standards' debate is also worth taking into account, not only for its intrinsic interest but also because it forms another 'ideological schema' capable of inhibiting curricular innovation. It is here that the 'mutual distrust' between linguists and 'lay speakers' noted by Cameron (1995) starts to become visible. The belief that standards of English in Hong Kong are falling, and have been for some time, is one of the most frequent topics of metalinguistic discourse. In 2009 a visiting professor from the US was reported as saying that:

> There was an explicit decision made after 1997 to shift the medium of teaching to Chinese. Since then, students use less English as school. And in the past 10 years, there has been a deterioration in students' quality … if we want to develop Hong Kong's capacity, students must be able to speak English fluently and should be comfortable in using English in communication.

> (Sin 2009)

This observer links 'falling standards' to the MOI policy changes in 1997, but similar charges of 'falling standards' have been made since the late 1970s (Joseph 2004: 134). It has to be said that these charges are usually made in the absence of any evidence. There is a tendency for linguists to see 'falling standards' as a myth (e.g. Gao 2011), and therefore as a manifestation of the 'distorting' properties of language ideology. Joseph (2004: 160) provides an insightful summary of the debate, and argues that the perception of falling standards has taken place against wider access to education and a 'tremendous rise in social opportunity … a democratization of the language'. It can be argued that rather than standards going into decline, what is actually happening is that more people than ever before are using English. Joseph further argues that linguists' characterizations of 'Hong

Kong English' and public perceptions of 'falling standards' are in fact 'two sides of the same coin, two ways of looking at the same phenomenon'.

I will return to Joseph's view of 'Hong Kong English' later in this chapter, but for now it is worthwhile to note his suggestion that we think in terms of 'stories': 'linguists have a different story concerning language in Hong Kong than the one that has emerged in public discourse' (Joseph 2004: 160). Again, the strategic insight here is that we have to take these stories seriously if there is to be any communication, and any chance of implementing the insights of linguistics and sociolinguistics. The prospects for introducing a more tolerant approach to variation are not encouraging, at first sight: acknowledging local variation would probably play into the hands of the 'falling standards' lobby, unless it is carefully handled. In debates about language in Hong Kong and elsewhere, we come to realize that the education system is an attractive site for intervention, but a problematic one because it forms an integral part of wider societal structures and belief patterns. In particular, proposals that affect language teaching are likely to activate a number of ideological schemata, each with origins and effects that go far beyond language itself.

Hegemony and accent hierarchization

As well as drawing attention to the fact that the lens of 'ideology' needs to be applied to linguists' views (see Gal and Irvine 1995), the above discussion of language ideologies also illustrates different approaches to the concept of ideology in a wider sense. Lippi-Green's (2012: 67) definition of SLI is linked with a somewhat Marxist view of ideology as 'the promotion of the needs and interests of a dominant group or class at the expense of marginalized groups'. A more nuanced understanding of ideology is provided by Gramsci's (1971) concept of *hegemony*. In Gramsci's original formulation, this refers to the totality of forces that holds a society together; it is therefore subtly different to ideology if this is held to be a 'class-specific system' (Harpham 2002: 98). Not even the ruling class knows its own interests, and a hegemonic circumstance is one in which 'a whole body of practices, assumptions, values, convictions, orientations, perceptions and judgments structures the sense of reality experienced by an entire culture' (Harpham 2002: 99). A Gramscian approach therefore involves an awareness of 'the overlapping, internally divided, and variable nature of the forces that circulate in society' (Harpham 2002: 98). Hegemony should not therefore be used as a mere cover term for domination (Edwards 2011: 196), although the more subtle 'domination by consent' is a recurring term in discussion of his work (e.g. Luk and Lin 2006: 13).

In this section I will focus on the accent-related study of Luk and Lin (2006), who identify 'accent-based linguistic hierarchization' in Hong Kong and link it to the concept of hegemony, or rather a 'hegemonic ideology' (p. 19). Accent hierarchization involves the valorization of 'external' or Inner Circle accents such as those perceived to be from Britain, North America and Australia (the so-called 'BANA' grouping), and the devaluation of local, Cantonese-influenced accents.

This ideology takes several forms, and can be observed across different sites. Luk and Lin (2006: 9–12) identify three manifestations of it in Hong Kong:

1   There is a deferential attitude towards NET teachers and towards 'native speakers' in general, revealed by questionnaire data on perceptions of accuracy, and decisions to use native speakers in recording listening material and radio programmes.
2   In media and public discourse there is a noticeable orientation towards 'proper' pronunciation, which relies on 'native-speaker' norms. Local Cantonese-speaking English users also participate in this characterization of accent differences in the media, as in the 'LegCo' story related in Chapter 1. Because they often fail to differentiate between different kinds of accents and accent features, the overall effect of these discourses is to create the impression that 'good English' and 'Cantonese accent' are mutually exclusive.
3   The Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT), a local examination for English teachers, serves as 'the most powerful mechanism' to bring about the standardization of external norms, according to Luk and Lin (2006: 9). There are two main sources of evidence for this claim. First, the descriptors for pronunciation require the absence of L1 accent features. I will return to the LPAT and its pronunciation descriptors in Chapter 8, but it must be pointed out here that Luk and Lin are referring to pilot versions of the descriptors (Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2000: 110). Later and current versions (e.g. Education Bureau 2010) are more intelligibility-oriented and do not explicitly equate proficiency with the absence of L1 features. Second, and despite the officially formulated guidelines, local experts involved with the development and administration of the test are often intolerant of local variation. One such expert, a Cantonese speaker with a background in speech pathology, told Luk and Lin (2006: 10) that local student teachers should try to eliminate all L1-related accent features, regardless of their intelligibility characteristics.

As to the origins of the 'hegemonic ideology' involved, Luk and Lin (2006: 12) contend that, while the domination of English in Hong Kong is a result of colonialism and linguistic imperialism, the perpetuation of 'BANA-centric' linguistic norms seems to be 'an ideology of local production'. So as with Morrison and Lui's analysis of the MOI issue, we have moved beyond imperialist ambitions and 'cultural dupes', and towards the notions of locally constructed ideologies operating in a more diffuse, hegemonic manner. Nevertheless, there are specific sites and institutional practices that can be identified. In Luk and Lin's account, the education system, examinations and the media form ideological 'state apparatuses', as in Althusser's (1971) sense of the term; among these apparatuses, the 'educational ideological apparatus' is seen as dominant. This perhaps explains why the educational system is often the focus of attempts at counter-hegemonic reform, achieved via interventions in teacher training, teaching materials, examination descriptors and so on.

The advantage of hegemony as an analytical tool is that it highlights internal divisions and contradictions, thus avoiding a simplistic 'domination' scenario based on local/global or traditional class-based oppositions. If applied carefully, the notion of 'hegemony' offers more purchase on the situation by emphasizing internal differentiation and stratification, and by acknowledging the nature of ideology as something that is reproduced in everyday practices and interactions. But in doing so it also signals the enormous complexity of the processes involved. Neither the macro- nor the micro-level is characterized by unity. In Hong Kong, the secondary school system is decentralized, and the providers include Catholic, Protestant and Methodist churches, Buddhist and Taoist organizations, and non-religious community groups. These institutions may therefore present a diverse set of values. On the other hand, language ideologies are often seen as taken-for-granted facts, and may be relatively widespread across such institutions.

Focusing on questions of identity, Luk and Lin (2006: 15) speculate on other contributions to accent-based hierarchization. Drawing on Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) typology (see Chapter 3), these include the relational aspects of the 'Hong Kong identity'. Mathews and Lui's discussion of national identity in Hong Kong suggests that there are complex, conflicted and shifting senses of belonging. Luk and Lin (2006) speculate that just as it is part of the Hong Kong identity to speak Cantonese with a 'pure' Hong Kong accent, another part of this identity is to speak English with 'a 'standard' or prestigious accent from the West (Luk and Lin 2006: 15). To some extent both aspects of identity gain, or gained, their traction from being locally distinctive *vis-à-vis* mainland China:

> Accents, being powerful linguistic and identity markers, may have conveniently provided a form of social and cultural symbol for Hong Kong people to distinguish themselves from their fellow Mainlanders.
>
> (Luk and Lin 2006: 15)

Within Bucholtz and Hall's principle of relationality, this also suggests the identity move of distinction. Such questions of identity have become prominent in recent years, with increasing polarization between political camps. Broadly speaking, in these debates two poles of local identity have appeared: a 'democratic' position which emphasizes self-determination and a distinctive Hong Kong identity within the larger Chinese sphere of influence; and a 'pro-establishment' position which emphasizes intregration with mainland China, and downplays local distinctiveness in order to highlight a sense of national identity.[1] This polarization relates to, and may be a further development of, the identity 'conflict' between 'internationalness' and 'Chineseness' noted earlier by Mathews and Lui.

In discussing 'relational identity', it has to be pointed out that mainland China has developed enormously in economic and social terms since the time of Luk and Lin's article. Many of the mainland students who come to study in Hong Kong universities have the kind of international exposure and English proficiency that used to be the privilege of those born in 'Asia's world city'. As differentiation from outsiders becomes more difficult, differentiation from other Hongkongers

is perhaps more likely to occur, as in Besnier's (2004) account of the identity processes of 'distinction' operating in Tonga (see Chapter 3). This brings the analysis towards social differentiation, also a pertinent topic in view of the fact that Hong Kong possesses one of the highest levels of economic inequality in the 'developed' world. The ideology of 'accent hierarchization' also originates from and is maintained by socioeconomic factors. Hierarchization reflects a highly competitive culture, which tends to encourage the acquisition of commodified forms of language (such as 'American accent'). Those with a comparative advantage in language proficiency may show overt or covert prejudice towards those beneath, and will tend to resist changes that threaten their dominance. These are widespread and predictable phenomena, and they are not merely 'linguistic' in origin.

In general terms, considering the varied sites, practices, orientations and judgments involved in phenomena like accent hierarchization, one gains a sense of the all-encompassing nature of hegemony. If we wish to resist its excesses by proposing reform, there are no 'easy targets' – linguistic imperialism, former colonizers, 'native speaker' tendencies in education – and we are all implicated in the reproduction of hegemony. Reclaiming the sense of 'hegemony' as an entire 'body of practices' makes us realize that individual and micro-level acts, such as an English teacher's favourable reaction to 'American accent', or a family's decision to send their children to an English-medium school, all take place within an overarching framework that is deeply ideological.

Counter-hegemony and reform

Given this complexity and internal division, it is somewhat disappointing that Luk and Lin eventually resort to a familiar 'colonial/postcolonial' frame to introduce their proposals for reform. The researchers express surprise that Hong Kong is apparently diverging from the 'World Englishes paradigm' of postcolonial states with a 'preference for the localized varieties and an overt unfavourable attitude towards accents bearing traits of the colonizers' speech' (Luk and Lin 2006: 6). As noted in Chapter 5, these dichotomous local/global, internal/external, present/past oppositions lack descriptive and explanatory power, and are in need of refinement. They create the impression that 'postcolonial states' have consensus-based 'localized varieties' with agreed-upon norms, and that these varieties lack internal differentiation between 'standard' and 'non-standard' registers and styles. Because of this there is little point appealing to the 'World Englishes paradigm' for inspiration: the apparent divergence does not arise from Hong Kong people's reluctance to pull together under the banner of 'Hong Kong English', but rather from the inability of the WE paradigm to cope with internal complexity and the effects of globalization. As was argued in Chapter 2, placing 'localized varieties' in contradistinction with 'the colonizers' speech' sets up an essentialized contrast that drastically oversimplifies the nature and scope of the factors involved.

To counter accent-based hierarchization and hegemony, Luk and Lin (2006) suggest three targets for reform, those of assessment, research and curriculum. These are specific goals and deserve serious attention, despite the drawbacks of

the WE approach. The first target means that language assessment and testing, such as the LPAT, should not involve the assumption that a Cantonese accent is incompatible with intelligibility, or, to put the 'myth of non-accent' another way, 'the faulty view that native English speakers do not speak with an accent' (Luk and Lin 2006: 16). At the same time, Luk and Lin remind us that caution is required, that there is still a need to distinguish between 'local accents and careless speech' (2006: 17). This is a notable break with the 'sociolinguistic orthodoxy', namely that 'language always has variations that are all linguistically correct' (Doerr 2009: 195). It also suggests that it might be possible to make a distinction between 'accent' and 'pronunciation', the latter being associated with problematic features that threaten intelligibility.

The second, 'research' part of the reform agenda can be seen as an elaboration of this tentative accent/pronunciation distinction. It consists of finding the 'common denominator of the World English phonologies' (Luk and Lin 2006: 13). A model or standard based on a 'spectrum of educated professionals' is required (Luk and Lin 2006: 13). This could begin at a regional level:

> For example, there could be an Asian Pacific variety of World English pronunciation based on representative authentic speech samples from educated speakers from the composite varieties. Some form of corpora could be established from which mutual identifications of unintelligible phonological features could be identified from regional informants. For every target phonological feature, there would be a range of variants some of which will be incorporated as acceptable variants in the common regional variety after taking into consideration their systematicity in occurrence and degree of impact on cross-linguistic intelligibility.
>
> (Luk and Lin 2006: 13–14)

The outcome of this orientation, Luk and Lin hope, would be 'role differentiation' as opposed to 'hierarchization', a differentiation that recognizes a 'repertoire of varieties to suit different communicative contexts and purposes'. Many of the points made by Luk and Lin align with the positions that are starting to emerge in this book. The focus on local features and intelligibility relates to quadrants 1 and 2 of the model introduced in the previous chapter. The idea of 'acceptable variants' starts to break down the strictures of the 'variety' approach, but the 'common regional variety' referred to here appears to risk reinstating it. As noted in Chapter 5, the tendency to observe 'common' features and then abstract a 'common regional variety' must be seen as a legacy of structuralist linguistics, or of Bucholtz's (2003) 'sociolinguistics of nostalgia'. The 'contradiction of community' noted in Chapter 5 is also visible here in the attempt to reconcile 'acceptable variants' with a 'common regional variety'. The argument that I will go on to make is that we can indeed accept 'variants', but without the temptation to posit and reify a 'common variety'.

The third area for attention is curriculum reform, which would involve three strands: the incorporation of the 'more or less codified' regional varieties of English into the English learning curriculum, thus orienting it more towards international

communication; a kind of 'reverse training' for native speakers, who need to be made aware of the diversity of acceptable linguistic variants emerging from World Englishes; and an 'ideological critique' against the linguistic hegemony which 'naturalizes the status and privileges of speakers who happen to speak the accents of the colonial masters'.

Regarding codification, in Chapters 2 and 5 I outlined some of the conceptual and practical obstacles involved, most of which relate to the general weaknesses of the WE approach. These include the problematic and divisive definition of 'educated' or 'professional' speakers, and the fact that people are no longer seen to merely 'speak the accents' of predetermined social categories – they construct aspects of identity in complex ways, reflecting the complexity of the actual and imagined communities people inhabit. In Luk and Lin's view, the existence of hegemony is signalled by the valorization of 'British' accents, as opposed to local, Hong Kong ones. But this neglects the subtleties of the semiotic processes involved; as has been suggested earlier, both the phonological features and their indexicalities extend far beyond 'local/non-local' or 'colonial/postcolonial' polarities. The discussion of language ideologies in this section suggests that the 'standard/non-standard' polarity is relevant; it is possible to evoke 'standard' indexicalities in a 'local' way, once we have abandoned the idea of monolithic local accents.

The remainder of this chapter will examine these issues in more detail through the example of Hong Kong English. Despite the difficulties posed by the variety-based WE approach, Luk and Lin's three areas for reform – assessment, research and curriculum – indicate specific and apparently achievable ways in which the study of global English may be able to provide useful local applications. They also highlight the importance of ideological awareness when approaching matters of educational reform.

Hong Kong English

The WE version of 'counter-hegemonic intervention' at a global scale has been the description and valorization of local varieties. This process aims to invert hierarchies or at least to establish a 'club of equals' (McArthur 1987: 334). The last part of Luk and Lin's 'curriculum' reform proposal can be seen as an attempt to reconfigure the linguistic market; Li (2007: 12) notes that raising awareness of World Englishes is seen as 'an important strategy to promote the legitimacy of non-native varieties of English, and, at the same time, reduce the linguistic capital of NS-based models of English'.

The situation in Hong Kong is particularly interesting in that some observers (e.g. Bolton 2003; Groves 2011) have concluded that 'Hong Kong English' is at the point of 'emerging' as an autonomous variety in the WE paradigm. In this section I will take a detailed look at the status of Hong Kong English, revisiting some of the questions raised in Chapters 2 and 5 about variety status and codification from a specific geographical standpoint. If the focus in the previous section was on ideologies of language as they exist in communities of language users, the spotlight here will turn to the ideologies of language analysts, an understanding of which

is necessary in approaching the topic of variety status and evaluating pedagogical proposals. The role of accent-related studies in the debate about Hong Kong English is also highlighted here.

Accents and the determination of variety status

In a traditional approach to linguistic varieties there are several criteria that can be used to assess variety status, usually understood to mean the extent to which a regional or social grouping possesses its own, internal, *sui generis* linguistic norms. Mollin (2006) employs the three criteria of function, form and attitude: 'function' is concerned with the use of a variety in different domains such as the media or literary creativity; 'form' relates to the development of 'unique linguistic features, which need to be communal and systematic' (Mollin 2006: 198), while 'attitude' considers the degree of acceptance of the new variety by its speakers.

The limitations of some of these criteria should already be clear. The nature and boundaries of the 'grouping' have to be accepted from the outset. In the linguistic aspects of the criteria, the idea of 'communal and systematic' features suggests residual structuralism: communication is enabled by 'shared' features, and these features belong to an underlying system that pre-exists description by linguists. As for attitude, survey responses depend on how the local 'variety' is characterized, as the acceptability data in Chapter 7 will show. Not only is what counts as 'local' eminently contestable; the composition of the associated 'variety' is also an ideological matter.

The criteria produced by Butler (1997) are more detailed, and are employed by Bolton (2003) to assess the status of Hong Kong English. Butler's approach is of interest here because it mentions accent as one of the indicators of variety status. The five criteria are:

- A standard and recognizable pattern of pronunciation handed down from one generation to another (i.e. accent)
- Particular words and phrases which express key features of the local environment and which are regarded as peculiar to the variety (vocabulary)
- A sense of community history as being linked to the variety
- A body of literature written without apology in the variety
- Reference works (e.g. dictionaries and style guides) which show that people in the language community look to themselves, not some outside authority, to decide what is right and wrong

(Butler 2003; adapted from Bolton 2003: 206)

After reviewing these criteria, Bolton's overall conclusion is that

the sociolinguistic conditions associated with the emergence of a 'new English' are now evident in the community, and that Hong Kong English can now claim recognition as one of the 'World Englishes' in the Kachruvian paradigm.

(Bolton 2003: 224)

Focusing on the accent-based criterion, it soon becomes clear that the difficulties of defining and delineating 'accent' leave considerable room for interpretation. One of the first studies of Hong Kong English was that of Luke and Richards (1982), who concluded that 'there is no such thing as "Hong Kong English"'. The researchers also observed that 'Hong Kong Chinese whose English approaches native-speaker competence thus speak English with British or American accents, usually the former' (p.55).

Conclusions about the status of 'Hong Kong English' or any other variety depend crucially on how the entity is conceptualized. In Luke and Richards there is a certain circularity of reasoning: if a speaker has a British or American accent, they are perceived to be approaching 'native-speaker competence', *ergo* 'competent' speakers have British or American accents. This excludes the vast majority of speakers, and it also has the effect of denying the possibility that even these 'competent' speakers might speak with some kind of Hong Kong accent in terms of recognizability – if not in terms of using 'typical' Hong Kong features, which is the usual requirement of linguists. As noted in Chapter 4, a recurring problem in accent-related research is the treatment of accents as systems of features. This leads to listeners being presented with 'typical' accents, while the nature and effects of variation within the accent continuum is unacknowledged. One of the few studies to address this issue in Hong Kong was that of Bolton and Kwok (1990). The researchers set out to describe the features of Hong Kong English accents, as well as modelling variation and investigating attitudes towards different accents. They posit a 'dynamic' model of the Hong Kong accent, according to which speakers combine 'local' accent features with those from British and American norms. A speaker's positioning in this dynamic model is said to exhibit the 'clustering' of items from the different sets of norms, suggesting that combinations of features are not random but are constrained by co-occurrence restrictions.

In Bolton and Kwok's model the motivation for these positionings lies in speakers' acts of identity (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), in which the use of more 'Hong Kong' features is related to an affirmation of a Hong Kong identity (Bolton and Kwok 1990: 167). Again, from the perspectives of 'third wave' sociolinguistics (Eckert 2012) or super-diversity the concept of a singular 'Hong Kong identity' would be seen as problematic, but the model does capture certain aspects of the local/translocal interaction: features of English, some more recognizably 'local' than others, form material for the production and reproduction of identity positions. Recurring patterns or clusters occur, and these tend to be associated with different stances or identities. What is perhaps missing from the model is an acknowledgement of developmental pathways in accent acquisition; these also lead to patterns of co-occurrence, as seen in the 'implicational' model of Trofimovich *et al.* (2007; in Chapter 3). Individuals differ in their ability, as well as their willingness to use these accent features, and there is considerable variation along with the recurring patterns. The accent-related data in Chapter 7 also show evidence of these patterns of co-occurrence.

Bolton and Kwok's repertoire-based model does not, however, constitute evidence for 'variety' status at the level of accent. This alerts us to the existence

of a problem with Butler's first criterion, namely that it conflates recognizability and standardization. Accents are of course 'recognizable' in that listeners with sufficient experience associate speakers with a particular place, social group, or situated identity; this is what our evolutionary inheritance and socialization processes have equipped us to do with accent variation. But recognizability does not confer stability or standardization on the 'accent' itself, which must by definition remain a 'loose bundle' of features. A single accent feature may be enough to allow recognizability, as the shibboleth story tells us, but this has no connection with standardization: not all speakers may use the feature in question, or it may occur in other accents.

An additional problem with Butler's accent criterion is that accents are seen to be 'handed down' from generation to generation via face-to-face, oral transmission; this may have made sense in the pre-internet era, but as the data in Chapter 7 will suggest, English accents are influenced by far more than generational, or even peer-based, transmission.

Accent attitudes and variety status

The dimension of attitude is clearly an important one in assessing variety status, as seen in Mollin's (2006) criteria. The accent study of Bolton and Kwok (1990) also investigated Hong Kong listeners' evaluations of Hong Kong English accents. Listeners were presented with two kinds of Hong Kong accent, a 'mild' one and a 'broad' one, along with similar pairs of American accents ('mild and 'broad') and British accents ('advanced RP' and 'near RP'). The overall results are used by Bolton and Kwok to contend that 'a substantial number' of respondents displayed 'an overtly positive attitude to models of English associated with local bilinguals' (p.170), lending support to the idea of variety emergence. As mentioned above, the problem with this kind of claim arises from the inherent variation in accent, and the consequent vagueness of the term 'models'. The features of the accents in Bolton and Kwok's study were not specified, as in the majority of accent attitude studies. As a result, the 'English associated with local bilinguals' is a moveable feast for analysts: if we adopt a continuum image (e.g. Hung 2000), there may be clusterings of 'British' or 'American' accent features at one end, while at the other there are more obviously 'local' accents, with Cantonese influences arising from both acquisitional constraints and identity factors. In between, and perhaps of more significance to the discussion of accents and varieties, there are recognizably 'Hong Kong' accents that have few or none of the features described as 'typical' by linguists.

We could use metaphors of 'blending' to characterize these 'in between' accents, but if we accept that there are no 'pure' accents, *all* accents involve blending. The category labelled 'the English associated with bilinguals' is so wide as to be almost meaningless, and marking it off from other categories is all but impossible without making paralysing assumptions. At what point does an internationally influenced Hong Kong accent shade into a Hong Kong-influenced international accent? Is there a cut-off point at which speakers cease to be 'Hong Kong'? Neither phonological analysis nor listeners' opinions can do more than

provide partial arbitration; both involve decisions about the origins of accent features, the required qualifications of speakers and listeners, and so on. The impossibility of answering these questions suggests that 'accent' is a *terra nullius* open to rival political claims. It is, to say the least, a problematic criterion for claims of variety status.

As has been argued before, if there is any empirical basis upon which to assess accent variation and its relation to variety status, it lies in the *features* involved. Bolton and Kwok's study does not consider this, and until recently no other attitude studies departed from the undifferentiated 'Hong Kong English accent' approach. For instance, Forde (1995) found that Hong Kong students reacted least favourably to English spoken with a 'Hong Kong accent', when also provided with samples of American, Australian, British (RP) and British (Yorkshire) accents; the Hong Kong speaker was classed as 'middle proficiency' (Forde 1995: 64). Luk (1998) surveyed secondary students' attitudes towards a local English accent and a British RP accent. The representativeness of the local accent was verified by pre-screening, as in Forde (1995), and by asking respondents to agree or disagree with the statement 'I think that most Hong Kong people speak like him or her'. Again, the great majority (86 per cent) wanted their teachers to have RP-like accents. The study of Li (2009) also found an overwhelming preference for native-speaker accents amongst local university students. Chan (2013) addressed another dimension of accent variation by investigating listeners' judgements of acceptability in different contexts, ranging from formal (e.g. teaching and news broadcasts) to informal (e.g. class discussion, or chatting with non-native-speaker friends). There was a clear preference for native-speaker accents in formal contexts, with non-native-speaker accents becoming more acceptable as formality decreased. But out of the seven samples, the Hong Kong accent sample was rated the second lowest for acceptability in formal contexts, remaining below the mean for all but the 'chatting' context.

In all of these studies, the 'typicality' of the accent samples is part of the research orientation and methodology, with its underlying assumptions of *abstand* or formal distinctiveness. But the pursuit of 'typical' accents in these and similar studies largely explains the findings: linguists' conceptions of typicality do not speak to language users. Many of the 'typical' accent samples contain features which are not commonly found in the speech of high-proficiency users, as is shown in Chapter 7. Applying the four-quadrant model suggests that some of these 'typical' features are likely to cause intelligibility problems, even for local listeners. For example, Li's (2009) accent sample included the substitution of [n] for /l/ (pronouncing *nice* as *lice*; Li 2009: 87). Chan's (2013) sample includes initial consonant cluster deletion (pronouncing *fresh* as *fesh*) and the co-occurrence of vowel and consonant modifications (pronouncing *snake* as *slack*; Chan 2013: 60). These are distinctive Hong Kong features, but they would also be predicted to reduce intelligibility in both international and intranational communication, according to the LFC criteria listed in Chapter 4. Listeners may be reacting to low intelligibility, rather than the 'localness' of the accent samples.

If the students had been presented with different kinds of Hong Kong English, there may well have been a different outcome. But – and in a reprise of the

'contradiction of community' noted earlier – if the pursuit of typicality were to be abandoned, the rhetorical appeal of the 'variety' label would be lost. At a time when the 'language as entity' approach has been severely criticized for its misrepresentation of complexity, the pursuit of typicality leads to accents and 'varieties' being made into precisely these entities. Listeners and survey respondents are usually forced to choose between the 'typical' categories provided by linguists (e.g. 'HK English', 'China English' and 'NS-based standard English' in Li 2009). These categories are determined principally on the basis of conformity with previous descriptive accounts, so that the 'key descriptive criterion' for Chan (2013) was that the samples should have the 'distinctive phonological features of their accents'. In a similar fashion, the study of Kopperoinen (2011: 77) included the requirement that 'several features typical of the accent had to occur in the extract'.

The effects of the pursuit of typicality can also be seen in the study of accent attitudes carried out by Jenkins (2007). Questionnaire respondents were asked to rank nation-based accents such as Chinese English, British English and so on. Predictably enough, the findings resemble those of previous attitude studies and are taken by Jenkins to indicate a 'deep-seated bias' (p. 105). But the respondents were not given actual samples, and hence their responses tell us nothing at all about these 'accents' in concrete terms. They must be seen as reflecting people's attitudes towards internalized concepts – stereotypes, even – of groups of people and their 'typical' accents. If one proposed a survey which purported to investigate attitudes towards 'Americans' or 'Swedes', without clarifying which kind of Americans or Swedes were involved, it would probably be denounced as unscientific. In accent research, however, undifferentiated 'typical' accents have formed the conceptual and methodological basis for a majority of studies.[2]

It may of course be appropriate to speak of an American accent or a Swedish accent in certain circumstances, as long as we avoid confusing recognizability and standardization.[3] It is accent *features* – not abstract 'accent' categories, or one's status as a native or non-native speaker – that affect listener responses. In other words, the researchers mentioned above are mainly categorizing according to nation-state origin and an associated 'accent', while the principal determinants of listeners' responses lie elsewhere. Following the line of argument developed in the preceding section, listeners may, for example, be evaluating according to standard/non-standard or intelligible/unintelligible polarities that are largely independent of nation-state origin.

I have dwelled on the 'typicality' issue for some time, because it seems to go to the heart of accent-related research in an era of global English. The fixation on typicality again reflects an enduring strand of traditional approaches, namely the intertwined notions of variety and community. People are assumed to speak in particular ways because they come from a particular community, a speech community based on a particular geographical location. The sociolinguistic conditions pertaining to Hong Kong undermine these assumptions, as does the overhaul of the contents of the traditional sociolinguistic toolkit: varieties, systems and geographically defined communities.

Accent description and variety status

Descriptive studies of the Hong Kong accent have also been used to assert the existence of a local variety, one with 'systematic features of its own' (Luk and Lin 2006: 17). Accent plays an important role in the discursive construction of variety status; something resembling Butler's criterion of 'standard' pronunciation appears to be the underlying criterion. For example, the study of Hung (2000: 337) concluded that Hongkongers share a 'common underlying phonological system'. Bolton (2003) adds this to the evidence for emergence, claiming that the study 'has led to the growing recognition of a distinct HK English accent'. What is relevant to the discussion of variety status are the assumptions involved in these claims, assumptions which again demonstrate the complexities of 'accent' and its relationship with place and identity.

As an example of descriptive studies, Hung's (2000) study involved recording and analysing the pronunciation of fifteen first-year undergraduate students from Arts and Science majors. The predominance of students as the source of descriptive data needs to be noted; by coming fromfirst-year students, the samples are more likely to be from a particular part of the accent continuum. There was indeed considerable commonality in many of the pronunciations. The prevalence of /v/ substitution, in which /v/ is pronounced as either [w] or [f] – *very* becomes *wery*, and *leave* sounds like *leaf* – was so great that Hung (2000: 350) concludes the /v/ phoneme does not even exist in Hong Kong English. The apparent systematicity of pronunciations such as these, and their evident departure from 'standard' norms, leads to the claim that there is a 'common underlying phonological system' (Hung 2000: 337).

As noted above, it is indisputable that there is an 'identifiable' Hong Kong accent, one which is 'just as easily recognizable as Indian, Singaporean or Australian English' (Hung 2000: 337). But recognizability does not confer variety status, or suggest the existence of a 'standard'. The recognizability of an accent does not depend on a 'common' system, but on the use of sufficient features – perhaps only one, if it is quantifiable at all – to be recognizable for a particular listener or audience. In Hung's and in similar studies of features and variety status, there seem to be two related assumptions: first that there has to be a degree of commonality in the 'system', and second that this commonality signals the 'emergence' of a separate variety. The first, as I have already made clear, is an inheritance of structuralism and first-wave sociolinguistics, the product of a 'linguistics of community' rather than a 'linguistics of contact' (Pratt 1991). These approaches neglect 'surface' variability in favour of identifying the underlying system, and fall into the 'monolithic trap' identified by Hall (2013: 214): despite the token acknowledgement of variation, what tends to emerge from such data are discrete systems and a 'family' of monolithic 'varieties'.

The second assumption, that of variety emergence, is problematic in that the entity which emerges is not actually very representative. It results from the arbitrary decisions of researchers about whom to include, and therefore whom to exclude. It is ideological insofar as it erases the fact that the 'variety' construct

emerges from the analyst's parameters (see Gal and Irvine 1995). It unavoidably reproduces the discrete 'system' approach, with all of its limitations. But none of this would be particularly problematic were it not for the fact that the linguists involved presumably *want* 'Hong Kong English' to be given legitimacy, as part of the project of opposing hegemonic domination. The problem then is that local users reject linguists' characterization of the 'local', as can be seen in the attitude studies listed above. The blame is usually attributed to ideology, in one form or another; Bolton (2003: 224) surmises that 'recognition has been blocked by a cluster of attitudes and ideologies'.

I want to argue here that in Hong Kong, the recognition of a 'local variety' has also been blocked by linguists' rather dogmatic pursuit of typicality. In other words, the entity that arises from linguistic description, under the variety approach, is not one towards which local users feel a sense of ownership. The misrecognition of 'Hong Kong English' in accent studies is largely due to it being conceptualized and presented as a category with 'typical' features, rather than as a continuum with complex linguistic and non-linguistic influences. To employ Joseph's terms, linguists have found that their own 'story' of Hong Kong English is rejected by its users, but they seem reluctant to consider the possible reasons for this. In doing so, they also miss the fact that, while a local *variety* is a problematic construct in terms of acceptability, local *variation* need not be; however, this needs more research in order to discover the features that affect judgements of acceptability. In the next chapter I will summarize the findings of my own research in this area. The next section of this chapter explores the problems of the variety concept in more detail by examining claims of the 'emergence' of Hong Kong English, and evaluating moves to codify it in the manner suggested by Luk and Lin.

Variety status, codification and strategic essentialism

One of the things that makes Hong Kong English particularly interesting as a case study of global English is the widespread feeling, among analysts of various kinds, that a distinctive variety is emerging. Apart from Bolton's (2003) announcement, Joseph (2004: 149) believes that Hong Kong English is 'well along the path of emergence' in terms of linguistic form, although its status is unlikely to be recognized until some time in the future, 'well after 1997'. Hong Kong English is 'only now emerging as an independent variety', according to Deterding *et al*. (2008: 171). Placing it further along the path of emergence, but simultaneously crediting it with less maturity, Groves (2011) sees it as being 'already present' in 'embryonic form'. This is the case both linguistically and attitudinally, suggesting progress from Joseph's earlier assessment (Groves 2011: 40).

Several commentators (e.g. Kirkpatrick *et al*. 2008; Groves 2011) refer to the dynamic model of Schneider (2003) in supporting their claims for the variety's stage of development. This model was designed to explain, and to a lesser extent to predict, the emergence of new varieties of English in postcolonial contexts. In Schneider's model, the two main factors that drive variety emergence are 'rewritings' of identity and changing inter-group relationships

(Schneider 2003: 242). The groups involved in these processes are 'settlers', providing what Schneider calls the 'STL strand' of these evolving identities and relationships, and the indigenous population, providing an 'IDG' strand. Over time, identities are recalibrated from an 'us and them' dichotomy to a more inclusive sense of 'us', and contact between the two groups leads to convergence in terms of socioeconomic and communicative relationships.

As already noted, Hong Kong is far from being a 'typical' postcolonial situation, and many aspects of the model appear to be less than relevant. The numerical presence of the STL strand was always low in Hong Kong, and the continuity of the 'STL population' as a causal factor after 1997 seems doubtful. What is striking about Schneider's model, when applied to Hong Kong, is first that the shared identity of the 'indigenous' population is assumed; as studies such as Morrison and Lui's reveal, 'identity' is anything but shared or unitary in this stratified, globalized city. Second, and relatedly, the 'colony' is treated as an almost closed system with its own internal dynamics. This becomes much less tenable under conditions of super-diversity, when English resources flow through mediated channels, and when there is far more movement and migration of all kinds.

According to Schneider (2003: 258), Hong Kong has reached stage 3 (nativization) of the five-stage model of variety emergence, with some traces of stage 2 (exonormative stabilization) still observable. Stage 3 is described as being 'the most important, the most vibrant one, the central phase of both cultural and linguistic transformation' (Schneider 2003: 247). It is often associated with political independence, but nevertheless a strong sense of attachment to the 'mother' country remains, and identity is semi-autonomous (Schneider, 2003: 247). The STL strand may be differentiated between 'conservative' and 'innovative' orientations, and a 'complaint tradition' often arises. Letters to the local press and other outlets are taken as signs of insecurity about linguistic norms; the 'falling standards' debate can also be seen taken as a manifestation of a 'complaint tradition'.

If Hong Kong were it were to progress towards stage 4 (endonormative stabilization) there would need to be greater linguistic self-confidence in order to 'go alone' and create its 'own standards' (Gordon and Deverson 1998, in Schneider 2003: 250). There would also need to be a more cohesive sense of identity, more agreement about what these 'standards' consist of. Schneider (2003: 250) notes, citing Wodak *et al*. (1999), that nations and national identities are 'discursive constructs' which emphasize 'national uniqueness and intra-national uniformity but largely ignore intra-national differences'. This recalls the identity processes of adequation and distinction noted in Chapter 3, applied to the nation-state level. Language itself – hitherto heterogeneous, an uncertain ally – becomes both the medium and outcome of this discursive construction, and codification is seen as part of the means by which linguistic independence can be achieved.

It is perhaps inevitable that codification appears to be an attractive strategy in raising the profile of 'local English', simultaneously reducing 'native-speaker' authority over the language. Luk and Lin (2006) draw attention to the need for 'more or less codified' varieties as part of their proposal for curriculum reform.

Schneider (2011: 219) observes that the acceptance of new or modified norms 'requires some sort of a consensus … as to what they consist of'. The proposed solution is codification and a dictionary: 'the systematic and empirical analysis and description of educated indigenous forms of English in dictionaries and grammars' (Schneider 2011: 219). The compilers of *A Dictionary of Hong Kong English* (Cummings and Wolf 2011) are explicit about their aims regarding recognition and ownership. The dictionary is intended to be a 'contribution to the recognition of Hong Kong English as a legitimate and independent variety of English' (Cummings and Wolf 2011: p. xviii). The dictionary's guide to pronunciation does little or nothing to recognize a Hong Kong English accent, however, because transcriptions are only given for words of 'non-English' origin.

The dictionary has made a valiant effort to be inclusive. There are words of Cantonese, English and South Asian origin. It is acknowledged that native speakers may also use Hong Kong English. But such inclusiveness points to the instability of Hong Kong English as a codifiable linguistic entity. A dictionary is an attempt to find or rather encourage consensus, but by keeping the gates open and forming such a broad category, the ontological status of Hong Kong English becomes uncertain and the dictionary lacks binding power. This is partly the result of a mismatch between the immense diversity of 'language' and 'identity' in Hong Kong, and the underlying assumptions of a dictionary. For one thing, a 'national dictionary' assumes an essential connection between 'nation' and 'language':

> The assumption that a language must be grounded in a particular community is essentially an extension of the idea, first developed in relation to English in the sixteenth century, that modern languages belong to those nations who claim them as their national property.
>
> (Benson 2001: 206)

Benson (2001: 209) goes on to ask how dictionaries can begin to 'represent international English as it actually is – "heterogeneous, dynamic and infinitely variable in its regional, social and temporal dimensions". The answer may signal the end of the dictionary as we currently know it. The possibilities considered by Benson include dictionaries written by their users, not by 'authorities'; words listed without assumptions as to their status; and words with competing definitions, side by side (Benson 2001: 210). A further possibility is suggested, but not explored:

> If the authority of the dictionary of English … is based upon its ethnocentrism, is it not time to see the deconstruction of authority in matters of language and culture as an opportunity of the post-imperial age?

Returning to Luk and Lin's call for varieties to be 'more or less codified', the same argument seems to apply to the activities of linguists in the WE paradigm; Benson's question suggests that linguists may have little role to play in the evolution of global English. This is also the view of Saraceni (2010: 14–15): 'the ownership and appropriation of English, as well as the right to subvert its rules, have very little

to do with what linguists say about them'. The attempted codification of varieties is another kind of verbal hygiene, in Cameron's (1995) terms, one that 'confers on academia the role of arbiter of people's linguistic behaviour' (Saraceni 2010: 13). In response to Schneider's call for 'some sort of consensus', there is little evidence of consensus, and it is not within the power of linguists to create it, unless they form part of wider nation-state ideological apparatuses.

Attempts by 'linguistic entrepreneurs' to secure the recognition of a delimited language variety should therefore be viewed as a form of strategic essentialism, as noted in Chapter 5. It is important to acknowledge the uses of strategic essentialism; it has the important function of 'redressing power imbalances, as when the group under study is seen by the dominant group as illegitimate or trivial, or when a stigmatized group forms an oppositional identity' (Bucholtz 2003: 401). It is undertaken to achieve a short-term goal – in this case, the recognition and legitimation of local language forms – with acknowledgement of its limitations in the longer term (Bucholtz 2003: 401). Strategic essentialism, then, captures something of the ideological quality of language 'varieties' and puts it to use, deploying the oppressor's tactics against itself.

My main objection to strategic essentialism in global English debates is that it brings us face to face with the contradictions and paradoxes of description, and of the linguistics of community. Rather than 'discussing each ethnic group's language variety as a bounded entity and qualifying these statements with critiques of reification', I believe, along with Benor (2010: 172) that it is time to move beyond this contradiction. Another, related objection is that it seems unlikely to achieve its goal of undoing or inverting the 'hegemonic ideology' that Luk and Lin (2006) identify in Hong Kong. Descriptions of the 'variety' that meet the analyst's need for distinctiveness and 'typicality' do not stand up to scrutiny. They also risk alienating the people who are assumed to use it, as the long series of accent attitude studies in Hong Kong suggests.

Although I have argued for the waning relevance of the variety approach in general, it is possible that within the broad categories of 'language' and 'identity' there are specific, exceptional aspects of the Hong Kong context. Hong Kong does not easily fit into many 'models of development', and Schneider's model of postcolonial language evolution is no exception. It is interesting that stage 5 of Schneider's model is called 'differentiation'. It involves the internal diversification of language, reflecting the fact that society is less united around the idea of the nation and instead resembles 'a composite of subgroups, each marked by an identity of its own' (Schneider 2003: 253). It is possible to argue that Hong Kong has *already* reached stage 5, by-passing stage 4 and much of stage 3; one might speculate that stage 5 is when the pre-existing diversity of the community becomes visible once again, having been obscured by the linguistic and ideological imperatives of strategic essentialism and nation-state building.

The possible exceptionalism of Hong Kong *vis-à-vis* Schneider's model derives partly from it not being a 'typical' postcolonial situation. But further observation suggests that 'typical' postcolonial situations along the lines set out by the model are difficult or impossible to find, when nation-state borders are

permeable and internal differentiation is generally increasing. After considering Schneider's model, Van Rooy (2010: 16) believes there is no guarantee that an 'extensive range of conventions will ever be established in the case of Outer Circle varieties as is the case with Inner Circle varieties'. Variation in the input is one explanatory factor given by Van Rooy, and in Hong Kong this can arise from many sources: educational policies such as English or Chinese MOI, opportunities to travel or study abroad, having a domestic helper who speaks English, family attitudes towards English, and so on. As a brief consideration of the four-quadrant model presented in Chapter 5 suggests, variations in linguistic 'input' factors combine with variation in sociolinguistic orientations towards English, and lead to extremely diverse 'output'.

The emergence of a variety, traditionally defined, seems highly improbable under these conditions, and moves towards codification have to be seen as prescriptive, rather than descriptive, activities.[4] In terms of making recommendations for pronunciation teaching, there is something that can be salvaged from the debris of the variety approach, however. As has been argued at several stages of this book, it is necessary to focus on accent or pronunciation *features*. Moving away from *variety*, and towards *variation*, may help to undermine some aspects of 'accent-based hierarchization' in language teaching. The next chapter presents accent-related data from Hong Kong and starts to identify some of these features.

Notes

1　Another view of the polarity contrasts idealists and realists, or 'dreamers' and 'doers' (Ho 2014).
2　A general critique of the 'circular law' that lies behind the pursuit of typicality can be found in Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other*; it undermines the idea that 'the one who is *most,* most purely, or most rigorously, most essentially Franco-Maghrebian would allow us to decipher *what it is to be* Franco-Maghrebian *in general'* (Derrida 1996: 11; emphasis in original).
3　Elder-Vass (2012: 113) puts it thus: 'there are at least sometimes clustered sets of partial linguistic norms that it is reasonable to name in these ways, although it is clear that the boundaries of such clusters are generally rather vague'.
4　It can of course be argued that moves *away* from codification are also prescriptive activities. Continuing this argument, and in recognition of the fact that there is 'no view from nowhere' (Gal and Irvine 1995: 995), the 'post-variety' proposals put forward in this chapter can also be viewed through the lens of language ideology.

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7   Somewhere between

Accent and pronunciation in Hong Kong

This chapter presents different kinds of accent-related data from the Hong Kong context, using the four-quadrant framework introduced in Chapter 5 as an organizational aid. Naturally, the data presented cannot be seen as 'covering' each quadrant; each of them could easily form the subject of a book-length study. Furthermore, for reasons of space this chapter can do no more than summarize the research studies that generated the data. The orientation here is integrative; the chapter aims to provide complementary perspectives on accent and pronunciation in Hong Kong and to inform the pedagogical proposals in Chapter 8, weaving together some of the themes and issues that have been developing in the book. The use of both 'linguistic' and 'sociolinguistic' data also exemplifies the kind of multi-perspectival approach that I have been advocating. The underlying questions the chapter addresses include: what does it mean to speak – or to speak of – 'Hong Kong English' under conditions of globalization? How do local people conceptualize and respond to accent variation, and how does this affect decisions about the 'what' and the 'how' of pronunciation teaching?

The data are presented in the following order: first, there is a survey of accent variation in Hong Kong, using samples taken from television broadcasts. This is initially discussed in terms of quadrant 1 and the L1/L2 relationship, but the patterns of variation are also used to signal the relevance of other quadrants. I then move to quadrant 2, where the data focus on the hitherto neglected question of the intelligibility of Hong Kong English accents for Hong Kong listeners. In the more sociolinguistic quadrants (3 and 4), the investigation first addresses the pedagogical dimension of 'acceptability', aiming to shed more light on the 'model' question via an accent attitude survey carried out with local listeners. Finally, interview data from Hong Kong students who are studying English pronunciation allow individual voices to be heard, and serve an additional integrative function: in discussing their orientations towards accent and pronunciation the students also refer to topics that came to prominence in earlier chapters, such as intelligibility, pronunciation models and the difference between the terms 'accent' and 'pronunciation'.

Variation in Hong Kong English accents

In Chapter 6 I argued that 'descriptive' studies of Hong Kong English accents have emphasized what these accents have in common; it is also necessary to find out how they are different. It is a truism to say that there is great variation within most 'accent' categories, just as there is within any linguistic category defined on a geographical basis. Here we are confronted with the question of just how loose these 'bundles of features' can be without unravelling entirely. As explained in Chapter 5, one of my main objections to the 'Hong Kong English' label is that the very act of naming tends to reify the category and encourage a reliance on 'typical' accents in research. There is a resultant polarization between 'native' and 'non-native' accents. I have also argued that this may be a hindrance, rather than a help, in achieving recognition of 'local' language use in pedagogical and other contexts – people tend to reject the category that is presented as 'local' by linguists. This does not mean that there is no scope for the 'local' in language teaching, however. A necessary preliminary for accent studies, and for producing pedagogical recommendations, is an account of variation in the local context. Such an account will need to focus on accent *features* and their distribution. It will also need to try to explain the variation, however tentatively and incompletely.

My approach to the question of accent variation involved gathering samples from English-language television programmes in Hong Kong. This was intended to reflect the diversity of accents within the broad category of 'English-knowing bilinguals' (Bolton and Kwok 1990: 170). It also represented a deliberate attempt to focus on English *spoken with a purpose* – not that of reading a script for an undefined audience, but that of talking about a specific topic with an interviewer or group of discussants. The study of variation thus moved the focus to *users*, rather than learners; many Hong Kong English accent studies (e.g. Hung 2000; Deterding *et al*. 2008; Setter *et al*. 2010; Stibbard 2004) have taken their samples from students. The speakers who appear on English television programmes arguably form a sample of 'high-proficiency' users, as by agreeing to appear (or being allowed to appear) in such a programme, their spoken English must have been adequate for the task. The label 'high-proficiency' is of course problematic: variation occurs for reasons other than proficiency level, stylistic or identity positioning being one.

The patterns of variation that existed within a small corpus of twenty-five speakers are discussed in detail in Sewell and Chan (2010). There were two main findings that I will consider here. First, even within this 'high-proficiency' sample there is a great deal of inter-speaker variation in terms of the use of 'typical' Hong Kong accent features. Some of the speakers used almost all of the features in question; others used none, while still being recognizable as speakers from Hong Kong. This underlines the point made about the difference between 'recognizability' and 'standardization', made in relation to Butler's (1997) criteria, in Chapter 6. For example, the 'typical' Hong Kong feature of 'conflating' /n/ and /l/ was used by only two out of twenty-five speakers, and /v/ substitution by only four; recall that Hung (2000) concluded the /v/ phoneme does not exist in

Table 7.1 Selected consonantal features of Hong Kong English accents and their frequency of occurrence in the mini-corpus of twenty-five speakers (Sewell and Chan 2010; table adapted from Sewell 2015)

Feature	Examples	Number (and percentage) of speakers using the feature
Voiceless TH /θ/ pronounced as [f] ('TH fronting')	*thr*ee [fɹiː] *four*th [fɔːf]	6 (27%)
Voiced TH /ð/ pronounced as [d] ('TH stopping')	*th*at [dæt]	19 (76%)
Conflation of /n/ and /l/	*l*ine [naɪn]	2 (8%)
/v/ pronounced as [w] or [ʋ] in onset position ('/v/ substitution')	*v*ery [ˈweɹi]	4 (19%)
Unreleased final plosives	*lock* [lɔk̚]	(Not measured)
Devoiced plosives in final position	*ba*g [bæk]	(Not measured)
Dark 'l' deleted or pronounced as a vowel ('L-vocalization')	*coo*l [ku]	20 (80%)
Initial cluster simplification/deletion	*c*lothing [koʊðɪŋ]	8 (32%)
Final cluster simplification/deletion	*foun*d [faʊn]	(Not measured)

his version of 'Hong Kong English'. Substitution of the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ ('TH fronting') was also fairly uncommon, being used by six out of twenty-five speakers, but substitutions of /ð/ ('TH stopping') were far more widespread, with nineteen out of twenty-five using it. L vocalization was also common; only five speakers showed no evidence of it. Therefore, and to continue the argument made in Chapter 6, generalizations about 'the Hong Kong English accent' tend to obscure the existence of very different individual instantiations. Studies of attitudes towards the accent or variety need to take account of these patterns of variation.

Second, if we take an intra-speaker perspective, there are implicational patterns in accent variation. This means that accent features tend to co-occur: if we find a particular feature in a speaker's repertoire, we can predict that other features will occur with it. Implicational patterns have been mentioned in Chapter 3, in the form of Trofimovich *et al*.'s (2007) implicational scales and Altendorf's (2003) implicational hierarchies. In Altendorf's study of Estuary English, there were patterns of feature co-occurrence in the London/SE England accent continuum. A 'mild' London/SE England accent may include accent features such as the glottalization of intervocalic /t/ (as in *butter*) and L vocalization (affecting the final consonant of *feel*). A 'broad' accent may also include features such as h-dropping (*hedge* becomes *edge*). But it would sound strange, for those familiar with the accent continuum, for h-dropping to appear on its own, without other 'Estuary' features. The existence of implicational patterns is none other than the widely observed insight that variation is not random. There is 'orderly heterogeneity', as Weinreich *et al.* (1968) observed; 'not everything goes with everything else', as Halliday (1978: 158) puts it; and there are 'patterns

offering perceptions of similarity and stability that can be perceived as "types" of semiotic practice' (Blommaert 2010: 37).

Within the temporal frame of learning, implicational patterns also provide insights into the relative ease with which features and contrasts are acquired, and illustrate the differences between phonological contexts. Trofimovich *et al*. (2007) found that if a speaker is able to produce voiced TH sounds in 'difficult' phonological contexts, he or she will also be able to pronounce them in 'easy' positions, but not vice versa. The ranking of Hong Kong English accent features may therefore reflect levels of 'difficulty' and hence typical orders of acquisition. Some aspects of English pronunciation are easier to acquire than others; by the same token, some aspects of Cantonese phonology exert more noticeable effects, over a longer time frame, than others. If we move from the individual to the more collective level and take a pedagogical perspective, recurring and persistent features such as TH stopping and L vocalization may be relevant to a features-based approach to pronunciation models, one that allows for a more nuanced view of 'local norms' than that presented by the variety-based approach. These features will be identified in more detail in this chapter, and will enter the consideration of pedagogical options in Chapter 8.

If we consider the *reasons* behind accent variation, including the implicational patterns, difficulty of acquisition is only part of the story. There are of course multiple causative factors, and here the four-quadrant model helps to visualize some of them. Quadrant 1 draws attention to the linguistic constraints on acquisition, as discussed above. Moving towards quadrant 2, and from the temporal frame of 'learning' to that of 'interaction', there are also the effects of differential exposure and use. As speakers are exposed to different kinds of English, and as they use English with more interlocutors and in more contexts, they are provided with data regarding the frequency and information value of different features. As mentioned in Chapter 5, quadrants 1 and 2 have an interactive relationship, as do the associated temporal frames; communicative interactions provide opportunities for learning, which affect further interactions, and so on. The arguments for functional load and intelligibility presented in Chapter 4 are relevant here in indicating which accent features will tend to persist in speakers' repertoires.

There are also stylistic as well as acquisitional reasons for the existence of variation and implicational patterns: the use or avoidance of certain features allows recognizable identities to be performed. The 'sociolinguistic' half of the four-quadrant framework accommodates identity positions (quadrant 3) and patterns of acceptability (quadrant 4) as a further determinant of feature use and accent variation. The relationship between quadrants 3 and 4 is that acts of identity take place within a framework of normativity; identity is 'ascribed' by others as well as being 'achieved' by oneself (Blommaert 2005). Normative forces are exerted by the various centres towards which individual speakers orient themselves. Although much of the norming exerted by these 'norm circles' takes place unconsciously, speakers may develop a conscious or semi-conscious flexibility in the use of features, in order to gain access to a range of positionings in indexical space. This depends on the speaker's needs, and that of the situations in which they find

themselves; one might suppose, for instance, that it would be advantageous for many politicians to position themselves as being educated, internationally aware professionals who are also in touch with the local community. But it is not only politicians who need either situational flexibility or a more general 'in-between-ness'; Joseph (2004: 138) perceives that, in linguistic terms, the poles of 'standard British or American English' and 'no English' are both undesirable in Hong Kong. Achieving a balance between the various polarities may involve temporary stances and 'audience design' (Bell 1984), or more persistent identity positions.

Intelligibility

In Chapter 4, it was argued that studies of intelligibility need to acknowledge the role of features, rather than relying on undifferentiated accents (e.g. Hong Kong English *versus* British English, and so on). Among the studies that have investigated the intelligibility of Hong Kong English accents, most have relied on a variety-based approach. Kirkpatrick *et al*. (2008:362) used accent samples from 'reasonably well-educated English majors', but the authors note that all displayed 'typical' features of the local accent (p. 361). Because of the authors' preoccupation with establishing the credentials of a local 'multilingual variety of English' (p. 374), there is little indication of what kind of accents were involved, or how particular accent features affected intelligibility; the substitution of the voiceless TH sound /θ/ with [f] is mentioned as affecting the recognition of the name 'Kathy' (p. 368).

International intelligibility is certainly of interest in Asia's 'world city', but it is worth bearing in mind that English is often used in Hong Kong for *intranational*, and even intra-ethnic, communication (as noted in Chapter 6). The question of intranational intelligibility is therefore also relevant to studies of global English. Once we problematize the 'local' and acknowledge that there is variation in the local accent, we cannot assume that local speakers are automatically intelligible to each other merely because they use 'the same' variety or accent, or because they share knowledge of the local context. In Hong Kong, there has been very little research into this area. Li (2009) investigated Hong Kong and other students' attitudes towards a range of English accents, including those from Hong Kong. The study asked students about the comprehensibility of lectures in Hong Kong universities, but there was no indication of which accent types or accent features led to lecturers being easier or more difficult to understand. As I suggested in Chapter 4, the variety-based approach to intelligibility studies leads to contradictory findings and mixed responses. One student in Li's (2009) study believed that 'it is the *local professors* who are easiest to understand' (p. 115, emphasis in original), while another claimed that a native speaker accent is easier to understand (p. 117). Again, without some indication of the accent types or the accent features involved, there is no way to assess these comments or develop pedagogical recommendations from them.

To investigate the accent-related factors affecting intranational intelligibility, I played a set of twelve accent samples to fifty-two students and asked them to

write down what they heard (see Sewell 2015 for further details of the study). The students were taking introductory courses in English phonetics and phonology at a university in Hong Kong. All of them were first-language speakers of Cantonese from Hong Kong. Most of them came from language-related degree programmes such as English or Translation, and might therefore be expected to have above-average levels of English proficiency. The accent samples mainly came from the mini-corpus described briefly above, with the exception of one sample taken from the International Corpus of English (2015). There was one native-speaker sample, also taken from a Hong Kong television programme. The use of this sample set was intended to allow for comparison with an earlier study of acceptability which used the same sample set; the findings of this study are summarized in the next section of this chapter. There was no intention to compare 'non-native' and 'native' samples for intelligibility, as the focus here was on the accent *features* that affected intelligibility, regardless of who used them.

I will describe some of the characteristics of the set of accent samples here. Transcripts of the samples, and brief details of the speakers, are shown in Table 7.2. The speakers come from a variety of backgrounds, and cover a large part of the Hong Kong accent continuum. As might be expected from the study of variation, some use 'typical' Hong Kong features of the kind identified in descriptive studies. Speaker 12, for example, pronounces *progress* with initial cluster simplification (it sounds like 'pogress'). He also uses a [w]-like sound at the start of *virtually*, and the word *found* shows deletion of the final /d/ (despite occurring before a pause). Other speakers avoid these 'typical' features, while still being recognizable as Hong Kong speakers. Interestingly, and further revealing the limitations of simplistic local/global or internal/external distinctions, the British speaker himself uses features that have been described as 'typical' of Hong Kong accents, such as L-vocalization and substitutions of the dental fricatives. And speaker 10, who received some of his education in North America, uses certain Hong Kong features while introducing others from elsewhere, for example postvocalic 'r' in words like *party*. The final set of twelve samples was selected using several criteria: a target duration of around ten seconds, to avoid overtaxing listeners, and an absence of grammatical errors, to maintain the focus on accent features.

The accent samples were played through headphones in a language laboratory environment, and the students had to write down what they thought each speaker was saying. This is the 'transcript' approach to intelligibility, employed in various studies (e.g. Tsuzuki and Nakamura 2009) and reflecting its definition as the ability to *recognize* words and utterances. However, comprehensibility is inevitably involved when samples go beyond the word level. Students were told to leave blanks if they were unsure, but 'guessing' must also have played a role. Words that were 'correctly' transcribed may not have been heard accurately, but rather inferred from contextual clues. Similarly, words that are missed may have been heard accurately, but not written down because they did not seem to fit the context. The recordings were played three times, and students had up to two minutes, in total, for writing. This suggests that the problem areas represented significant intelligibility problems.

Table 7.2 Details of accent samples used in the intelligibility and acceptability studies

Speaker number	Transcript	Notes on speaker and context
1	They don't see an advantage in doing anything risky, and they don't have to because they think that they have all the cards now	Journalist, male, 50s, dialogic (studio discussion)
2	You can see the words commitment, sustainability and pragmatism. In the past year the economy has continued to perform well and we have built up a considerable surplus	Government official, male, 50s, monologic (public address)
3	China itself is quite heterogeneous these days, and there are many local identities, so to speak. So if we take a more relaxed attitude of national identity, I don't think we should be too bothered by it	Journalist, male, 50s, dialogic (studio discussion)
4	Well I think that the very concept of one country, two systems suggests the people of Hong Kong should try to at least maintain some of their own attributes	Politician, male, 50s, dialogic (studio discussion)
5	The applications of information technology in the clothing industry are diverse and varied, and it is impossible to cover all the options in two days	Government spokesperson, male, 50s, monologic (probably rehearsed)
6	There's no reason why the new leadership in Beijing would be more forthcoming, you know, in terms of granting Hong Kong a high level of political participation	Journalist, male, 50s, dialogic (studio discussion)
7	The question we need to ask is: does the public want KCRC run like a government department? MTR run like a government department?	Former civil servant, male, 60s, dialogic (interview)
8	There are many children who are not as privileged as we would like to think they should be	NGO spokesperson, female, 50s, dialogic (interview)
9	The accredited fish farm scheme aims at assisting the local fish farmers to enhance their operation and production standards	Government spokesperson, female, 30s, monologic (probably rehearsed)
10	Actually I have been with the party for a long time, ten years to be exact, but I have been serving mostly as central committee member and standing committee member	Politician, male, 40s, dialogic (studio discussion)
11	The quality migrant attraction scheme seeks to attract talented people and also talented people to bring their families with them	Journalist, male, 30s, dialogic (studio discussion)
12	And when they found, virtually there's no progress on democracy, I think people are confused	Journalist, male, 50s, dialogic (studio discussion)

The intelligibility data

As mentioned in Chapter 4, and as generally accepted in research, intelligibility is interactive between speaker and listener. Insofar as they can be separated, interpreting the data therefore requires a consideration of both speaker factors – accent or pronunciation features – and listener factors, such as the familiarity of the words. Mistranscriptions may not always equate with mispronunciations, but may be due instead to unfamiliarity with the word. In this type of exercise, the paradigm case for an accent feature to be implicated as the primary cause of an intelligibility problem therefore involves:

- Widespread mistranscription or omission of a word or phrase, one that is not judged to be unfamiliar for the listeners in question.
- A detectable accent or pronunciation feature that plausibly explains the processing difficulties experienced by the listeners.

The familiarity of a word for a particular audience is of course difficult to assess, but Table 7.2 shows that the topics involved – broadly speaking, current affairs – tend to involve some low-frequency vocabulary (*heterogeneous, accredited* and *pragmatism*, for example). This must be taken into account when considering the intelligibility data.

Before discussing the data, I must make it clear that by focusing on Hong Kong speakers I am not only concerned with the particularities of local speakers or listeners. Working out 'what was said' is complex, and it is my guess that almost *any* set of decontextualized speech samples, played to any audience, would be transcribed in different ways. Apart from accent variation, intelligibility problems also arise from the inevitable reduction in phonological information that takes place in natural speech. I referred to the principle of economy in Chapter 4, and Shockey (2003) calls the audible signs of this principle 'hypoarticulated' speech: vowels get reduced, and word boundaries are blurred under the influence of various connected speech processes. The aim here is therefore not only to identify problematic features of Hong Kong English accents, but also to investigate the possible constraints on information reduction that apply to *all* speakers. If there are guardrails or 'minimal norms of intelligibility', as was suggested in Chapter 4, intelligibility research of this kind helps to establish what they are. Furthermore, if these guardrails are related to general constraints on information reduction, the difference between intranational and international intelligibility may not have much significance; what causes intelligibility problems internationally will also tend to do so intranationally.

Transcript analysis focused on the content words that had been omitted or incorrectly transcribed. Space limitations prevent me from discussing the results in detail (see Sewell 2015), but I will summarize some of the main patterns here. The first noteworthy point is that the data support the arguments made in Chapter 4 regarding the relevance of functional load, in the broad sense – consonantal modifications, changes at the beginning of words and information reduction in

shorter words were all found to cause intelligibility problems. The three most frequently mistranscribed words were *accredited* (speaker 9), *virtually* (speaker 12) and *cards* (speaker 1), and considering these words will help to illustrate the role of 'functional' factors in intelligibility.

The word *accredited* was recognized by only one of the fifty-two listeners. The word is pronounced rapidly and there is a noticeable consonantal modification: the /t/ sound that ends the stem *credit* is voiced, thus sounding more like a /d/. This is the widespread English accent feature known as T-voicing, observable both word-internally and in sequences such as *beat it* – with this feature, /t/ is voiced when it occurs between vowels, if the preceding vowel is stressed. This accent feature is often associated with American English, but it also occurs in many other varieties; a first point to note is that 'consonantal modifications' are made by both native and non-native speakers.

Another noteworthy point is that consonantal modifications rarely occur in isolation. The discussion of intelligibility in Chapter 4 noted that consonant and vowel modifications often go together. In this case, what is more relevant for the intelligibility of *accredited* is that there is also some modification of the /k/ sound at the beginning of the stem, *credit* – it sounds more like a /g/, possibly explaining the alternative transcription of *aggregative* in an earlier study (Sewell 2012). This somewhat idiosyncratic feature may represent an extension of the energy-saving 'voice assimilation' principle behind T-voicing. The case of *accredited* also illustrates the analytical problem of co-occurrence: although such modifications may be insignificant on their own, their combined effect may be to prevent word recognition. It is instructive to recall Prator and Robinett's (1972) characterization of unintelligibility as 'the cumulative effect of many little departures from the phonetic norms of the language' (cited in Abbott 1991: 229). This could now perhaps be rephrased as the effect of departures from the guardrails of intelligibility; in informational terms, if too much information is missing or altered, intelligibility problems will occur.

Of course, *accredited* was probably an unfamiliar word for these listeners, and this must also be taken into account. But in this case it appears that the consonantal modifications resulted in students being unable to recognize even the more familiar stem *credit*; none of them produced anything resembling *credit* in any of their alternative or partial transcriptions. If we consider how intelligibility and comprehensibility interact, recognizing the word *credit* may have given some clue as to word form. If a listener has recognized '__credit__ fish farm scheme', then subsequent listening combined with linguistic knowledge – morphology and sound-spelling relationships, for example – may trigger the speaker's intended word. In cases of ambiguity listeners may turn to this kind of recursive processing in order to arrive at the speaker's intended target. A secondary observation from the case of *accredited* is therefore that the stem of words produced by affixation is important; an aspect of 'minimal norms' appears to be that recognition of the stem may assist with intelligibility. An alternative, or additional, explanation is that stressed syllables are important for intelligibility, recalling Bond and Small's (1983) characterization of them as 'islands of reliability' in the speech signal.

Turning to the case of *virtually*, transcribed correctly by 4 per cent of listeners, it is a little different in that the accent feature involved – pronouncing /v/ as [w] – is a feature of certain Hong Kong English accents. A similar feature also occurs in so-called 'China English' and 'Indian English' accents, but in global terms it is probably not as widespread as the T-voicing heard in *accredited*. It is often listed as a 'typical' Hong Kong feature, although the mini-corpus data suggests otherwise. Alternative transcriptions of *virtually* included *actually* (48 per cent of listeners) and *gradually* (12 per cent of listeners). The fact that these listeners realized an adverb was involved underlines what was said above about the importance of the stem – in this case, the consonantal modification of /v/ in initial position appeared to reduce the recognizability of *virtual*. This is to be expected from the consideration of intelligibility outlined in Chapter 4: word recognition generally proceeds from the beginning of the word, and hearing a [w] may have triggered a range of alternatives. Another example of /v/ substitution in initial position is provided by speaker 5's pronunciation of *varied*; although it was not one of the most frequently mistranscribed words, it was transcribed as *worry*, *worries* or *worried* by 17 per cent of the listeners.

The word *cards* (speaker 1) also illustrates the importance of consonantal features in maintaining intelligibility. It was correctly transcribed by 12 per cent of the listeners. The speaker pronounces the final consonant cluster as voiceless [ts] rather than voiced /dz/; furthermore, the [t] is weakly articulated. This pronunciation illustrates the widely occurring phenomenon of consonant cluster reduction, or as I prefer to call it here, consonant cluster modification (CCM). Despite its ubiquity in all varieties of English, there are also L1-related factors that affect the nature and scope of CCM (Schreier 2009). There are no consonant clusters in Cantonese, and here we can see evidence of the substitution strategy in which 'difficult' sounds are replaced by their 'easier' voiceless counterparts (Chan 2006: 300).

The effect of this pronunciation was to trigger alternative transcriptions such as *class* and *classes* by 37 per cent of the listeners, suggesting that the vowel was not among the causes of the intelligibility problem. The effects of familiarity here are difficult to assess; *cards* is probably lexically 'hard' because there are many competitor words in what Bradlow and Pisoni (1999) call the lexical neighbourhood. A familiar word like *cat* may nevertheless present difficulties because of the existence of common competitor words such as *pat*, *cot*, *cap* and so on. The effects depend on context, but we have already seen that non-native listeners are generally less able to make use of context in cases of difficulty. Bradlow and Pisoni's study found that non-native listeners had particular problems in recognizing familiar but lexically 'hard' words, those with many competitors. The researchers concluded that fine phonetic discrimination is required by these listeners (Bradlow and Pisoni 1999: 2074), suggesting in turn that contrast-preserving pronunciation is often required of speakers – both native and non-native – in situations where intelligibility is at a premium. An additional indication of the word *cards* is that the shorter the word, the greater the effects of information reduction (or alteration) in proportional terms. Cluster modification

in longer words like *commitment* (speaker 2, pronounced without the final /t/) has little effect on intelligibility, because there are many other clues to meaning.

The main lessons of the three words discussed above are once again that consonantal modifications often reduce intelligibility – or to put it another way, consonants provide listeners with important clues in the process of word recognition, as was argued in Chapter 4. As also predicted by the informational perspective taken in Chapter 4, if modification occurs in initial position (as in *virtually*), or if it otherwise has a high functional load (in the broad sense of 'information value'), its effects on intelligibility may be increased. There may of course be multiple and co-present causes, and *virtually* shows several of these – there is consonantal modification in initial position, in what happens to be a stressed syllable, which also forms part of the stem. Separating the differential contributions of these factors is therefore difficult because of the 'co-occurrence problem' mentioned in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, looking at the other frequently mistranscribed words, there is further evidence for the importance of these areas. Of the ten words that were most frequently mistranscribed, eight involved consonantal modifications. As well as occurring in initial position (in *virtually*), they were also found in medial position in *accredited*, *pragmatism* (speaker 2, with a weakly articulated /g/) and *standing* (speaker 10, with a weakly articulated /d/). In final position, consonantal modifications affected the final clusters of *cards*, *concept* (speaker 4) and *want* (speaker 7).

Travelling features: local and global distribution

By briefly considering the nature of final consonant cluster modification or CCM I will address what seems to be one of the most important questions arising from the intelligibility study: to what extent are the patterns observed here 'local', as opposed to 'global'? In the words of Bhatt (2010), which non-standard or otherwise noteworthy features remain 'local', and which 'travel' in the sense that they are widespread in many speakers' repertoires? And what are the implications for pronunciation teaching and testing? Taking the results as a whole, there are arguably three possible categories of accent or pronunciation feature to consider. First, there are features that are more 'local' in that they are directly related to the L1; /v/ substitution in *virtually* provides an example in Hong Kong. Second, there are features with more global distribution, such as the T-voicing in *accredited*. Third, there are features that contain elements of both categories: globally distributed, with local variations. The pronunciation of *cards* by speaker 1 is a case in point. The 'global' element is provided by the underlying origin of CCM: it is the outcome of a trade-off between economy and clarity, between the 'economy' or 'least effort' principle and the 'being understood' principle. There are also stylistic reasons for the avoidance or use of CCM, such as the desire to appear 'careful'. Simplification is more likely to occur when it has no effect on intelligibility, or when it will simply pass unnoticed (most speakers don't realize they are 'dropping' the /t/ in *next day*, and most listeners probably won't notice it either). The 'local' element of CCM includes L1-related constraints on

acquisition; the time and trouble needed to master the pronunciation of some consonant clusters probably exceeds the drawbacks of *not* pronouncing them.

The question then becomes: which 'local' forms of CCM – or by extension, other accent features – are likely to persist in speakers' repertoires, thus forming part of more collective language patterns? This is an important question because it aims to discover the features that can form part of an intelligibility-oriented local pronunciation model. The approach taken here, influenced by the four-quadrant framework, is to theorize intelligibility as a dynamic influence on speakers' phonological repertoires, rather than as a static measurement. It operates in the temporal frame of learning as well as that of interaction, and – viewed over a longer time period, in a collective sense – it affects the features that persist and become 'norms' in a statistical sense. In the study of variation, it was found that /v/ substitution has a fairly limited distribution – I would argue that this is partly due to its effects on intelligibility, as evidenced by the case of *virtually.* Similarly, certain kinds of final CCM are likely to reduce intelligibility; the modification of *cards* is a case in point.

But if we look at the set of accent samples as a whole, there were other kinds of CCM that did not reduce intelligibility. For example, speaker 2 deletes the final /t/ of *commitment*, and speaker 7 does this with *department*, but both words were recognized by a clear majority of listeners. Technically these are preconsonantal contexts, in which native speakers might also simplify the final clusters; but on the other hand both occur at the end of intonation units and are followed by pauses. Based on these and other instances, I would say that there is a strong tendency for Hong Kong speakers of English, even highly proficient ones, to delete final /t, d/ in two-consonant clusters – particularly after /n/ – in the last syllable of such multi-syllabic words. They do so for various reasons: some are related to being non-native speakers, such as having an L1 that prohibits clusters, while some are universal (the principle of least effort, the absence of intelligibility problems and the fact that such modifications are hard to detect). Over longer temporal frames, their output becomes the input for other local users, entrenching the patterns.

The kinds of CCM that did cause intelligibility problems in this study were rather different – the words in which they occurred were monosyllabic (*cards* and *want*) or bisyllabic (*concept*). The reduction of information was proportionally greater, and the listeners' ability to identify the words was compromised. Adopting intelligibility as a dynamic concept thus helps to identify features that are more likely to represent 'norms', in a statistical sense, and therefore to be convincing candidates for inclusion in local guidelines for teaching and testing. After all, if local features reduce intelligibility even in the local context, they are less likely to form part of the 'educated local standard', the ideal that guides much contemporary debate about 'local models'. And – to answer one of the questions posed at the beginning of this section – because of the centripetal factors underlying intelligibility, they are perhaps less likely to 'travel' in the sense of being persistent features of people's repertoires in other locales.

Exceptions occur, of course. Returning to the absence of an /æ, ʌ/ contrast in East African English (as noted in Chapter 4), or considering the lack of an /ɪ, iː/

contrast in several locales (including Hong Kong), we realize that the enormous redundancy of language allows such 'modifications' to persist, even though the contrasts involved have a high functional load and would be expected to cause intelligibility problems through their absence. In this case the four-quadrant model supplies a possible explanation: as mentioned above, sometimes the 'costs' of acquiring a contrast, in terms of overcoming L1-related constraints, exceed the 'benefits' in terms of being intelligible. The 'system', such as it is, can absorb these modifications because of residual redundancy (as long as most other contrasts remain in place). The absence of contrast thus becomes a feature that persists through quadrants 1 and 2, in both short-term and long-term temporal frames, at both individual and collective levels. It also becomes subject to the factors indicated by the more 'sociolinguistic' quadrants of the model, such as acceptability and identity; it is to these areas that I now turn.

Acceptability

Despite the arguments made above for the importance of intelligibility as a dynamic influence, linguistic factors are clearly not sufficient to explain accent variation and development. We also need to take sociolinguistic factors into account, as suggested by the sociolinguistic half of the four-quadrant model. In this section I present data relating to the acceptability of the Hong Kong English accent, with acceptability being defined mainly in terms of 'pedagogical acceptability' – the main value of the data at this point is that it further assists in the process of developing pedagogical guidelines. The analytical focus is again on features, and on different kinds of Hong Kong English accents. As mentioned above, the set of accent samples used in the intelligibility study (Table 7.2) was used again here, with a different group of listeners. This allows for some interesting comparisons to be made; as we shall see, what caused intelligibility problems did not always cause acceptability problems, and this allows for further theorization of the nature of 'local' language use.

Acceptability is seen here as belonging to quadrant 4 of the four-quadrant model, and represents the patterns of linguistic normativity or evaluative tendencies – judgements of 'better' or 'worse' forms of communication, in Blommaert's (2010: 38) terms – of a particular group or audience. We are thus in the realm of language attitudes, and from the very large literature on this topic, there are some key points that can be distilled by way of an orientation. Edwards (2011: 68) notes that many studies in various contexts have linked differential evaluations to a standard/non-standard dimension. A relatively robust finding is that the perceived standard evokes higher attitudinal ratings along a 'competence' dimension associated with traits such as intelligence and industriousness. Language perceived as being non-standard is usually rated more highly along dimensions such as 'social attractiveness' (friendliness, warmth) and 'integrity' (helpfulness, reliability and so on; Edwards 2011: 68). The indexical field for Singapore English proposed by Leimgruber (2013: 168) depicts similar polarities: around the twin poles of an overarching 'local/global' dimension, values such as seriousness, educatedness and

authority cluster around the 'global' pole, while the 'local' pole is associated with informality, friendliness and community membership. The 'local/global' polarity and its associated indexical values, as it is characterized here, therefore has much in common with the 'non-standard/standard' dimension described by Edwards.

The main complication and challenge for global English studies, as noted in Chapter 6, is that the 'standard' cannot be easily equated with the 'global' as if it were an external factor; it cannot only be defined in contradistinction to 'local' language use. To put it another way, people do not make a choice between 'Hong Kong English' and 'standard English', but – as far as their range and flexibility allow – between the feature combinations that create optimal identity positions. Polycentricity suggests that 'global' features and values often have to be combined with 'local' ones, even within the same utterance or conversation. At a more general level 'local' language also has standard and non-standard polarities within it. The challenge, once again, is to try to discover which *features* of local accents are important in affecting attitudes and triggering perceptions of 'standardness' or 'non-standardness', if this is indeed the relevant polarity.

The approach to the measurement of acceptability taken here had two phases: in the first phase, fifty-two undergraduate student listeners were asked to rate the twelve accent samples in Table 7.2. The study was carried out some time before the intelligibility study, and the groups of listeners were different in each case. The listeners were asked to agree or disagree with the following questionnaire items using a six-point Likert scale:

a The speaker sounds like a Hong Kong person.
b This speaker has a lot of pronunciation errors.
c This speaker is easy to understand.
d I like the way this speaker sounds.
e This speaker's accent is acceptable as a model for pronunciation teaching purposes in Hong Kong.
f This speaker has a high level of education and/or a high status job.

The responses to items B to F showed high levels of internal consistency, and were combined into a measure of 'overall acceptability' (see Sewell 2012 for further details of the data analysis). What is being measured here is thus a fairly narrow definition of acceptability, namely 'acceptability for pedagogical purposes' – a construct that allows further inferences to be made about the possible contents of pedagogical models. In interpreting the data, the usual caveats apply; Edwards (2011: 44) criticizes the use of 'disembodied behavioural snapshots'. One might expect such 'snapshots' to produce different effects with different audiences, but the initial indications of replication studies are that the sample set evokes quite similar responses. Three years after the original study I repeated it with a group of thirty-seven Hong Kong civil servants, and it was replicated the following year with a group of ninety postgraduate students, most of whom were native speakers following a language-related programme in the UK (see Setter *et al.* 2014). The average acceptability scores for these three groups are shown in Figure 7.1.
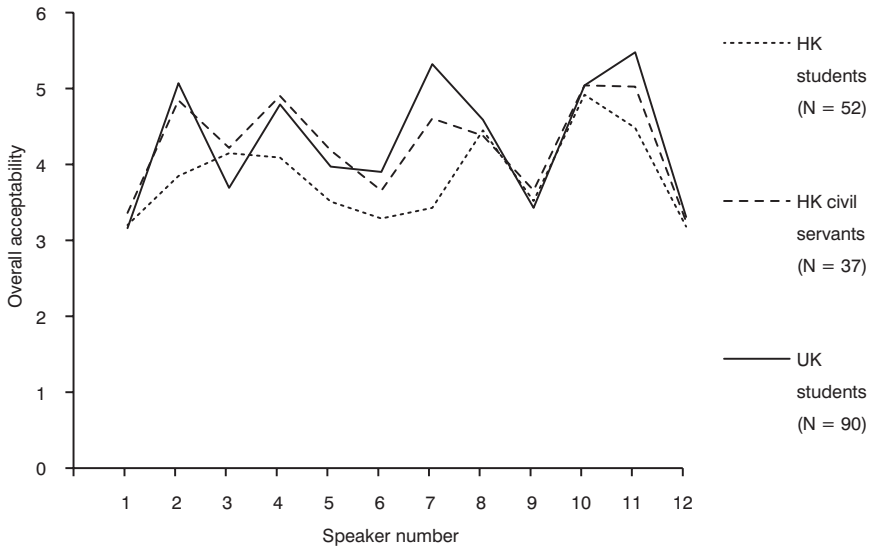
Figure 7.1 Overall acceptability scores for the twelve speakers and three groups of listeners

The graph shows that there were considerable differences between the ratings given to the different speakers; data analysis performed by Setter *et al*. (2014) revealed that many of the differences were statistically significant. Within each group of listeners, however, there was considerable agreement regarding the comparative ratings given to the samples. Speakers 1 and 12 were always in the lower quartile for each group, the other being either 6 or 9. Similarly, speaker 11 was always among the top three in each group, accompanied by speaker 10 in two of the groups. What can be said about these speakers, by way of an initial explanation? Speaker 11 is the British native speaker. Speaker 10 is a Cantonese speaker who received part of his schooling in North America. At first sight, the data appear to do little more than confirm the 'exonormative' preferences of Hongkongers, as indicated by the accent attitude studies listed in Chapter 6. As emphasized at various stages of this book, it is necessary to go into more detail and investigate how different accent features affect the responses.

Accent features and acceptability

In the second phase of the acceptability study, the aim was to gain insight into the effects of features, to go beyond the 'fairly gross' level of comparisons *between* accents in order to investigate some of the reasons behind the evaluations (Edwards 2011: 63). Immediately after completing the ratings, the students listened to the twelve recordings again. This time they were asked to mark transcripts with up to three phonological features which they thought were significant in terms of reducing their acceptability ratings. Thus there was no distinction in analytical terms between 'feature' and 'error' in the study; it did not decide in advance where

the 'errors' were, but allowed listeners to make their own decisions. Listeners were allowed to mark any kind of feature, using labels such as 'V' for a vowel feature, 'CC' for a consonant cluster feature, 'I' for an intonational feature and so on. Subsequent analysis and coding focused on segmental accent features, as the number of suprasegmental markings did not allow for the creation of robust categories. Students were also allowed to add comments to their markings, and these often assisted with coding and the development of categories. A total of 493 transcript markings were coded into nine categories, eight of which involved segmental features.

A regression analysis was performed in order to see how much of the variation in the acceptability scores could be attributed to the feature categories, and to identify the most important categories. The regression model indicated that just over 20 per cent of the variation could be accounted for in this way: a 'modest fit', in the parlance of regression analysis (Cohen *et al*. 2007: 538). The influence of other factors, both linguistic and non-linguistic, must of course be considered. These include linguistic features such as intonation and other suprasegmental or prosodic features, paralinguistic factors such as speech rate and voice pitch, and a host of what might be called non-linguistic factors such as the emotional 'tone' carried by the voices. When the regression procedure was performed, five feature categories were found to exert statistically significant effects in terms of reducing the acceptability scores. These are shown in Table 7.3 in descending order of significance.

It would of course be unwise to attribute too much influence to the feature categories on their own; they have to be seen as part of social performances, and the features above were accompanied by other linguistic and non-linguistic

Table 7.3 Features that significantly reduced acceptability scores

Category	Description and frequently marked examples
1. Syllabic modification	Changes to expected syllable structure associated with rapid speech (as suggested by listener comments): • *p<u>o</u>litical* (speaker 6; absorbed vowel in first syllable) • *a<u>ccre</u>dited* (speaker 9; voicing of /t/ and /k/)
2. Final consonant cluster modification, prevocalic position	Deletion of final /t,d/ in prevocalic or prepausal position: • *confuse<u>d </u>*(speaker 12) • *relax<u>ed</u>* (speaker 3)
3. Initial /v/ substituted with [w] ('/v/ substitution')	/v/ pronounced as [w] in onset position: • *ad<u>v</u>antage* (speaker 1) • *<u>v</u>irtually* (speaker 12)
4. Vowel substitutions	Vowel substitutions other than the replacement of reduced vowels with full vowels: • *w<u>a</u>nt* (speaker 7; nasalized vowel) • *m<u>ai</u>ntain* (speaker 4; shortened [ɛ]vowel in first syllable)
5. Other consonantal modifications	• *built* (speaker 2; /t/ pronounced as [d]) • *cards* (speaker 1; devoicing of final cluster, weak articulation of /d/)

phenomena. The features marked by students may simply be the most salient or most easily describable ones within these accent performances. Nevertheless, despite the inevitable intervening factors, the feature categories in Table 7.3 were marked frequently and they exerted significant effects on the acceptability ratings. It is interesting that some of the same words turn up here as in the earlier intelligibility study, and possibly for similar reasons. Speaker 9's *accredited* is an example: one listener suggested *agreded* as a representation of the speaker's pronunciation. As discussed in the previous section, there is a consonantal aspect to the intelligibility problem here (/t/ is pronounced as [d] in the stem, *credit*). Another student comment here was 'the consonants are not accurate', lending support to the conclusion of the intelligibility study regarding the effects of consonantal modification in this word. The introduction of the 'syllabic modification' category was intended to acknowledge that there is more going on than mere consonantal modification; the word is pronounced quite rapidly, and the consonantal modifications to /t/ and /k/ are perhaps best understood as reflecting the kind of overall modification to sounds and syllables that occurs in rapid or hypoarticulated speech. The perceived 'deformation' of the word is suggested by the fact that *agreded* has three syllables, rather than four. This observation extends the focus beyond 'sounds' to the larger units of meaning in which they participate, and is relevant to the discussion of pedagogical priorities in the next chapter.

Speaker 6's pronunciation of *political* includes what Shockey (2003: 26) calls a voiceless vowel in the first, unstressed syllable. The citation form shows a schwa /ə/, but here the vowel has been reduced to the point of disappearance; what remains is the plosive release of the /p/. There is nothing specifically 'Hong Kong' about the pronunciations of *accredited* and *political*, and they might well be placed within Szpyra-Kozlowska's (2013) category of 'idiosyncratic errors'. They are, however, associated with rapid speech. In terms of the 'economy/clarity' continuum, there is too much economy (for these listeners, at least). Too many sounds have been altered or removed. But while the 'guardrails' of intelligibility were visible in the case of *accredited* – it was the most frequently mistranscribed word in the intelligibility study – the word *political* complicates matters. It was correctly transcribed by a majority of listeners in the intelligibility study, but here it was one of the most frequently marked items in the entire exercise (twenty-nine out of fifty-two listeners marked it). Even so, listener comments included 'the word "political" is very unclear', and others appended 'confusing' and 'could be slower' to their marking of this word. General comments about this speaker included 'speaks too fast, pronunciation sounds strange, not clear enough'; 'some words are too fast'; and 'bad pronunciation in key words'.

It thus appears that listeners reacted negatively to what they perceived to be overly expedient phonological shortcuts – straying from the guardrails and minimal norms of intelligibility – even if there was no actual effect on intelligibility. I have elsewhere suggested that there may be a certain correspondence between the acceptability and intelligibility characteristics of accent features (Sewell 2012). The bottom-ranked speakers certainly use more features that can fairly be described as intelligibility-reducing, according to the criteria listed in Chapter 4.

It seems logical that listeners may be annoyed by having too many demands placed on them; perhaps they react negatively (in an emotional or affective sense) to what causes problems of understanding (in a more cognitive sense). But while there may be a general correspondence between acceptability and intelligibility, comparing the data sets reveals several exceptions. The exceptions are of interest here, as they provide further insights into how listeners evaluate accent and pronunciation features.

For example, the second category in Table 7.3, final consonant cluster modification, includes words that were unproblematic in the intelligibility study, such as *confused* and *relaxed*. The 'acceptability problem' seems to be that the speakers' consonant cluster shortcuts, although natural in phonological terms, were easily noticed because they occur in prepausal or prevocalic contexts. The word *confused* occurred at the end of a sentence, and *relaxed* occurred before the word *attitude*. There are other factors that contribute to the noticeability of the modifications; they both occur in stressed syllables, and involve the reduction of morphological information in the form of –ed suffixes.[1] Schreier (2009: 60) notes that consonant cluster reduction is generally less likely in such bimorphemic clusters. This tendency may have functional origins (speakers try to avoid being misunderstood), but noticeability seems to be the key in terms of reducing acceptability ratings in this context.

Continuing the pattern in terms of intelligibility and acceptability characteristics were words affected by /v/ substitution (row 3 in Table 7.3). This is a more distinctively Hong Kong feature, as noted in the intelligibility study. The words *virtually* and *advantage* were marked most frequently; the first caused intelligibility problems in the earlier study, but the second did not. Again, it seems to be the noticeability of the substitution, and perhaps its *potential* to participate in phonological contrast, that drew listeners' critical attention. The two remaining categories in Table 7.3 also include words that caused intelligibility problems, and those that did not. In the vowel substitution category (row 4), speaker 7's *want* was the most frequently marked item, but vowel modification was also accompanied by consonantal modification (as mentioned in the intelligibility study). Speaker 9's pronunciation of *maintain* was a frequently marked case of vowel substitution that did not contribute to intelligibility problems; in this case, the first syllable sounds rather like *men*. Finally, other consonantal modifications (the fifth category in Table 7.3) includes an item that reduced actual intelligibility (speaker 1's *cards*) and another that did not.

Acceptability and indexicality: standard language again

After comparing the intelligibility and acceptability data, it is noteworthy that almost every category in Table 7.3 includes some words that caused actual intelligibility problems, and others that did not. Linguistic factors such as intelligibility provide some insights, but are insufficient on their own. The sociolinguistic perspective comes into its own by identifying the *symbolic* dimensions of accent and pronunciation features; this draws upon the general

concept of indexicality (outlined in Chapter 2). Eckert (2012: 97) observes that 'recent findings in the role of sound symbolism in variation open up a new range of possibilities for our view of social meaning'. It is not only 'accent', defined in geographical or social terms, that contributes to the production of social meaning; many of the features, in both the intelligibility and acceptability studies, are best seen as the result of hypoarticulation or the tendency to reduce phonological information. Relatively few features are L1-related or distinctively 'Hong Kong', with the possible exception of /v/ substitution, although of course there are L1-related effects on the scope and nature of hypoarticulation processes. The different kinds of final consonant cluster modification, discussed above with regard to intelligibility, provide an example of this.

The important symbolic dimension of hypoarticulation and its counterpart, hyperarticulation or 'careful' pronunciation, is that they come to possess indexical values and nuances of social meaning. For example, in the study of Campbell-Kibler (2007), listeners associated hyperarticulated forms, such as the velar variant of *–ing* endings – *walking*, as opposed to *walkin'* – with qualities such as 'education, intelligence, formality and articulateness' (in Eckert 2012). The hypoarticulated, apical variant of *–ing* (*walkin'*) was presumably associated with the *lack* of these qualities, if we recall Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) principle of relationality (in Chapter 3). In general, hyperarticulated forms are capable of indexing values such as 'carefulness, precision, and general standardness, hence politeness, attention to detail, or education' (Eckert 2012: 97). A hyperarticulated accent feature such as 'releasing' /t/ with an audible sound has a further symbolic dimension that links the physical with the social: as a 'fortition' or strengthening, it becomes associated with 'emphasis or force, hence focus, power, or even anger' (Eckert 2012: 97).

If these associations between the manner of pronunciation and indexical qualities are generally applicable, it is unsurprising that the Hong Kong student listeners in the acceptability study noticed hypoarticulated forms, such as the rapid and reduced pronunciation of *political*, and gave the speakers lower ratings – these forms were both noticeable *and* indexically associated with qualities that were seen as less desirable, such as lack of precision. Indexical association may explain why pronunciations that did not cause actual intelligibility problems were nevertheless capable of reducing acceptability scores. But if we consider what it is that provides the listeners' norms of reference, the 'expected patterns', it is not the 'native speaker' norms of use that are so often invoked in World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca studies – as argued before, perceptions are influenced by knowledge of *written* language. In literate societies, speech that approximates writing will tend to have the indexical associations of 'standardness' noted above; this forms an indexical field (Eckert 2008) of ideologically related social meanings, ranging from 'educatedness' to 'precision'.

In Chapter 6 it was noted that the Hong Kong orientation towards 'standard' forms was seen by Luk and Lin (2006) not as an external imposition, but as a hegemonically maintained 'ideology of local construction'. We now gain some insight into how this ideology is maintained, by and through patterns of variation

and stylistic practice. Patterns of variation do not merely reflect 'linguistic' factors, and neither do they simply reflect speakers' positions in pre-existing categories; they form part of a system of social meanings that helps to *produce* social differentiation (Eckert 2012: 98). Similarly, 'style' is not mere embellishment, but is fundamentally ideological. It relies on ideologically maintained associations of linguistic forms with particular values, particular groups and particular views of the social order (Eckert 2008). The strength of the local orientation towards 'standard language' is not so much an indication of Hong Kong's attachment to the 'colonizer's speech' or to particular varieties of English, as Luk and Lin suggest, but rather of the pervasiveness of 'standard' and perhaps 'standardizing' orientations towards the social order *in general*. Linguistic performances that index values such as carefulness and precision will tend to be valued more highly in many situations, simply because these values happen to be seen as important in contemporary societies organized around principles of 'efficiency'.

In terms of their pedagogical implications, both the acceptability and the intelligibility studies have emphasized centripetal influences on English, and may appear to suggest that there is little space for local accents. But again, this depends on how we view the 'local'. As with intelligibility, the picture regarding acceptability changes somewhat if we consider the local accent features that did *not* exert significant effects on the ratings. Dental fricative substitutions are one example. There were thirty markings indicating the substitution of the voiced TH sound with [d] , as in the words *the*, *that* and *bothered*. But unlike final consonant cluster modification, of which there were also thirty markings, these noticeable instances of 'TH stopping' did not exert significant effects on acceptability. As mentioned in the intelligibility study, certain forms of consonant cluster modification were widespread in the samples (e.g. in speaker 2's *commitment*), but they had no significant effects on acceptability. Similar observations could be made regarding L-vocalization (in speaker 4's *people*), although in this case the low number of markings reduced the chances of achieving statistical significance in this study. There were of course other accent features that 'flew under the radar' in that they were seldom noticed, or even completely unnoticed; focusing on easily identified segmental features tends to obscure the fact that words are always pronounced with nuances, subtle appeals to the indexical field surrounding their use.

To summarize, there are three main indications of the acceptability data, supplemented by comparisons with the intelligibility data. First, acceptability judgements partly depend on accent features; listener reactions are significantly affected by the features that accents contain. Segmental features, such as those investigated here, are among the 'triggers' that affect these reactions. This is not a new finding in itself, but it does provide some possible guidelines for the development of pedagogical priorities. Second, even in the relatively demanding scenario of 'pedagogical acceptability' represented by the study, the findings suggest that certain kinds of local accents are likely to be acceptable for pedagogical use. This contradicts the findings of most 'accent attitude' studies carried out in Hong Kong (see Chapter 6). For example, and *contra* Chan (2013),

certain kinds of Hong Kong accents are not only acceptable for informal use, but also for the 'formal' domain of pedagogy. Third, a comparison of the intelligibility and acceptability effects of features led to the contention that rather than having 'exonormative' or 'native-speaker' orientations, listeners' judgements in this context were affected by their knowledge of written language and by the indexical associations of 'careful' speech.

Individual perspectives on accent and pronunciation

The data presented above have provided different perspectives on some of the linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions of accent variation. If something is missing, it is the individual perspective: how people, especially students and language learners, orient themselves towards issues related to accent and pronunciation. These issues include the approach taken to pronunciation in English learning, prevailing attitudes towards English accents and the meaning of categories such as 'Hong Kong English' in terms of features, intelligibility and acceptability. To round out the picture and conclude this chapter, I will summarize interview data from three Hong Kong university students. Although quadrant 4 has 'identity' as its major component, there is no attempt to explore the nature of the students' identity positionings in a detailed sense; nevertheless, the individual perspective reflects Wenger's (1998: 13) view of 'the person' as being formed through 'complex relations of mutual constitution between individuals and groups'.

I had been having conversations with students on these topics for several years, both inside and outside the classroom, before adopting a specific research orientation and protocol for the purposes of this book. This involved inviting undergraduate students from my introductory courses in English phonetics and phonology to a semi-structured interview. Two of the three students were in their final year of study, with one first-year student also taking part. All came from the Arts faculty of the university. One limitation of the interview data is that the students who volunteered to take part were those with higher levels of English proficiency and an interest in accent and pronunciation; as usual, the voices of those with lower proficiency levels, those who detest speaking English, are absent. There is of course no attempt to suggest that these interviewees are somehow 'representative' of the overall situation in Hong Kong. The interviews nonetheless represent, by way of a conclusion to this chapter, an effort to 'understand the whole through close attention to individuals' (Evans 1988: 7).

To structure the interviews, guide questions that aligned with the issues above were devised. The interviews lasted for between 16 and 52 minutes, largely depending on the interviewee's interest in the topics covered. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. When I had written up draft summaries of the interviews, I sent both the summaries and the transcripts to the interviewees asking for their specific consent to use particular comments in publications, and inviting them to give feedback on the draft. Because of my pre-existing relationship with the students and the fact that some of these topics had arisen in classes, I cannot claim to be a neutral recorder of issues that exist independently of the interviews.

The themes of 'Hong Kong English' and 'proficiency' recurred partly or mainly because of my interest in the topic, my verbal and non-verbal encouragement of topic development in these areas, and students' previous encounters with these topics. One of the main aims of the interviews was to discover what students actually understand by labels such as 'Hong Kong English', and whether they see themselves as using it. To return to the question asked at the beginning of this chapter, what does it mean to speak, or to speak of, 'Hong Kong English'?

Although I include a brief characterization of the interviewee's English accents, lack of space means that there are two caveats attached to this: first, my analytical perspective on accent features and types may not correspond with the way the speakers are perceived by local listeners. Second, the interview situation only represents part of the students' repertoire, and there is no suggestion that the students *always* use this type of accent.

Interview 1: Richard

At the time of the interview, Richard was in the final year of an English degree programme. He outlined his career interests as including fields such as the civil service, teaching and the media, in addition to possible postgraduate study. His personal 'history of English' is typical of many Hongkongers of his generation: first systematic exposure in kindergarten, primary school education predominantly in Chinese, English-medium secondary school. Asked about the type of English accent he had experienced during his pre-university education, he replied that it was 'mostly Hong Kong English, the classmates and some of the teachers'. The other English accent category with which he was most familiar was American English. During the previous summer he had travelled to South Korea and experienced difficulty in understanding some speakers, whom he could 'barely understand'.

When asked to describe his own accent he called it a 'traditional Hong Kong accent', but there are no noticeable instances of the Hong Kong accent features listed in Tables 7.1 and 7.3. Localness is therefore conveyed using other means, such as vowel qualities and an overall articulatory setting. The 'traditional' orientation suggests that unlike many speakers in Hong Kong, he does not identify with British or American English. He is nevertheless confident about his ability to communicate using this accent to a variety of audiences, adding that 'I can still communicate and express my own ideas perfectly to the native speakers'. If he were to attend a civil service interview, he would 'just go with the accent I'm most comfortable with'.

However, despite his identification with some form of 'Hong Kong English', he differentiates himself from certain other users:

> as a user of the Hong Kong English, I myself, I believe that most of them are understandable, but for some of them, like for example the people of the lower proficiency in English, then they may pronounce the words differently or even incorrect.

He thought that these 'lower proficiency' accents presented a possible obstacle to international communication: 'if it's of too low a proficiency then we cannot really understand it, it poses a problem'. So while he does not equate 'intelligibility' and 'proficiency' with native-speaker accents, the issue of proficiency level (or feature use) is something that Richard has noticed in his experience and observation of English communication in Hong Kong. The most distinctive features of the Hong Kong English accent, according to Richard, were the local versions of TH sounds. This applies to 'nearly everybody in Hong Kong', echoing the findings presented earlier about the prevalence of TH stopping, and suggesting its 'norming' at a statistical level. Perhaps his identification of these sounds also indicates that he does not think they are problematic in terms of intelligibility.

Richard's understanding of 'Hong Kong English' thus allows for both distinctiveness and variation within the category. His views appear to support the viability of 'high-proficiency' Hong Kong English accents in pedagogical contexts. Richard's viewpoint may have arisen partly as a personal reaction to the kind of 'accent-based linguistic hierarchization' referred to by Luk and Lin (2006), and his recollection of an accent-related experience in secondary school was striking in this regard:

> in my secondary school the teacher was very aware of the different accents, and she is able to tell what kind of accents each students have, and she probably compliment a student who has an American accent, and I was not very happy about this. Because you were born with the Hong Kong accent, and it's only because of her experience or some kind of talent that she can … able to get the American accent.

In view of Richard's interest in teaching as a career, we discussed whether teacher training might form a solution to this kind of apparent accent discrimination. In Richard's opinion, training should seek to encourage what he described as 'the right attitude towards language'. By this I understood Richard to mean that training should emphasize the independence of intelligibility and accent, and encourage more informed attitudes towards accent variation.

Finally, despite his suggestion that people are 'born with' an accent – I took this to mean that environment and experience constrain their possibilities – Richard also showed an awareness of the importance of education in overcoming these constraints. Early exposure to the sounds of English is necessary, according to Richard:

> I think the most important thing is to make it as early as possible, because using myself as an example, I only get in touch … I only know about the pronunciations until about secondary 1 or 2, that's pretty late for my age … because I've been learning English for so long, that for some of my phonetical features, I cannot really change easily.

The pros and cons of such an educational policy are beyond the scope of this book, but unequal access to English is of course one of the factors that creates and perpetuates hierarchization, in Luk and Lin's (2006) terms.

Interview 2: Jennifer

Jennifer differs from the other case studies in that she was in the first year of an English undergraduate degree programme at the time of interview. Her educational background is quite typical. What stands out in her case is the diversity of language and accent influences to which she has been exposed, even though she has never left Hong Kong for any significant length of time. Jennifer provides an example of the myriad possibilities for both 'exposure' and 'identity' under globalization and super-diversity.

When she was in kindergarten, Jennifer's family employed a domestic helper from the Philippines. In 2001 around 10 per cent of Hong Kong households employed domestic helpers (Choi and Ting 2009: 166), and the demand is constantly increasing. The influence of such caregivers on the English language development of Hong Kong children must be considerable, although it is often neglected in research (see Leung 2012). Jennifer herself believes that this may have increased her phonological awareness:

> I think it helped a bit, actually, because for instance I find it more easy to pronounce certain letters like 'r' or 'l', because Cantonese speakers tend to find it rather difficult, for instance my mother, she finds it really difficult to pronounce 'r' or 'l'.

Jennifer had two NETs (Native English-speaking Teachers) during her English education, both of whom were from Canada. She describes her local teachers as having Hong Kong English accents. But her major accent influences – in the sense of exposure, and of motivation in the form of role models – have been from the UK, and were obtained mainly via the internet. Films, in particular the Harry Potter series, have provided Jennifer with inspiration:

> I'm a big fan of Harry Potter, and ever since Form 3, I start listening to audio books by Stephen Fry … and then I also go to YouTube, because Emma Watson is my pronunciation model … she plays Hermione Grainger in Harry Potter. She's got an Oxford accent, very posh.

The words 'Emma Watson is my pronunciation model' remained in my mind, and formed part of the inspiration for what was written in Chapter 5 concerning the obsolescence of a narrow 'pronunciation model' concept. Students are now routinely exposed to all kinds of accents beyond the classroom, and in some cases they actively seek out particular kinds of exposure. The global and the local are inextricably linked – for some more than others, of course, whether out of choice or constraint. As something of a connoisseur of accents, Jennifer has followed

Emma Watson's accent development, noting the effects of her attending university in the US. It is interesting that, without having been to the UK, Jennifer has picked up some of the indexical associations and social meanings of accents:

> Professor McGonagall, she is very classy, and that's why she [the actress Maggie Smith] always plays like, classical drama, because she's got the accent … Ron is from a working class family, that's why he's less posh than Hermione.

This mapping of social space calls to mind the process of enregisterment, outlined in Chapter 2. Accents are linked with characterological figures (Agha 2005), and these 'images of personhood' are widely circulated across different discursive sites. So as the internet liberates by providing alternative possibilities for identity, it also tends to reinscribe existing hierarchies. Jennifer appears to have exploited the internet as a way to compensate for the limitations of her local environment: 'we've got very limited exposure to accents in Hong Kong'. Her high level of motivation is also related to her ambition to become an English teacher. Once again, her own accent is a hybrid, with some features that might be described as British at the level of vowel realizations, and virtually no 'typical' Hong Kong features.

However, and as if to restate the importance of adaptability, Jennifer believes that in conversations with her friends and classmates she uses more of a Hong Kong English accent. She sees this accent as being distinctive, and different from mere code-mixing. Relating this back to her educational experiences, she believes that her local teachers had a good mastery of English and were 'highly intelligible' even though they spoke with distinctive Hong Kong English accents. (Again, we have to be careful in interpreting what she means – distinctive may mean 'recognizable', without the need for any of the 'typical' features usually listed in accent studies.)

Jennifer makes a pertinent distinction between accent and intelligibility, and thus between accent and pronunciation. Accent is seen to represent one's 'passion', to involve areas like intonation and pacing, and means being 'pleasant to listen to'. Intelligibility is somewhat more mechanical, and is associated with 'articulation, more like pronunciation, enunciation'. This calls to mind the constructs of 'pleasantness' and 'correctness' underlying the questionnaire used in the acceptability study: if there was a correspondence between acceptability and intelligibility, in some cases, it may be because students perceived pronunciation 'errors' rather than accent 'features'. While she does not use the concept of proficiency, as Richard does, there is perhaps a similar implied distinction between stages of learning. Early stages involve attention to pronunciation, including articulation and enunciation, with a more-or-less objective orientation towards intelligibility. Later stages involve refinements and orientations towards more subjective concepts such as pleasantness and situational appropriateness; this is the domain of 'accent', for Jennifer.

As a possible future teacher, Jennifer has clearly given some thought to the difficulties of teaching and learning English pronunciation in Hong Kong. She

thinks that unlike her, many secondary school students 'don't have a pronunciation model or even put a great emphasis on it'. This may be a rational reaction to the educational environment, to some extent, as the current curriculum tends not to emphasize pronunciation. But despite the lack of instrumental reasons to learn about pronunciation, self-perceptions of 'accent' play a crucial role in learners' identities:

> many of my classmates, they also find it very difficult to learn accent, to perfect their accent, and they sometimes have low self-esteem because of their proficiency … because they're not confident enough about their accents, so find it very difficult to teach the students because they're not good enough, they think they're not good enough.

By 'teach the students' Jennifer is referring to the fact that many university students have part-time jobs as personal tutors to secondary school students. The lack of confidence that many experience is probably also felt by practising school teachers. It is the 'think they're not good enough' which is of interest here: Jennifer had previously said that her own secondary school teachers were highly intelligible. One likely explanation is provided by the powerful effects of normativity and standard language ideology, as they apply to accents in Hong Kong:

> It's just about the accent … it's just the atmosphere … it's interesting in Hong Kong, if you present a so-called better accent, they tend to have great admiration … even your English in other areas like your grammar or writing and any other thing … like A and B, if A have a good accent but she's not better than B in other areas of English, people will still think that A is better than B.

Jennifer's case study is particularly interesting for several reasons. It shows an awareness of the importance of perception, and suggests the limitations of intelligibility-based arguments for local accents in pronunciation teaching: accents that are 'better', even if 'so-called', evoke admiration and may cause listeners to overlook other shortcomings. Accents that are 'highly intelligible', on the other hand, offer no protection from feelings of inadequacy. Accents with 'international' indexicalities, such as British or American ones, are perhaps more likely to be seen as 'better', as Richard (above) experienced at school, and as Jennifer herself may have experienced. As mentioned in the discussion of identity in Chapter 3, they do not have to pass for actually *being* British or American accents; sounding relatively more British/American, or less Hong Kong, may be sufficient to activate perceptions of 'better'. The competition between 'rational' intelligibility factors and 'subjective' indexicality factors in determining responses is one of the indications of the four-quadrant model.

If one is looking to increase the confidence of local users of English, there seems to be a need for local role models. When asked about the possibilities

among local TV personalities, Jennifer started to consider a Hong Kong-born male as a potential candidate. I listened with interest to discover his identity, until she added: 'but he's from England'. The person being referred to is a media figure who was born in Hong Kong but educated in the UK, and who has a very British accent. I decided to follow up the question of the elusive 'Hong Kong English' role model with the third interviewee.

Interview 3: Nathan

Nathan was the only interviewee from a non-language-related degree programme, still within the Arts faculty of the university. He has no definite career plan, but would also like to be an English teacher. Nathan's educational background is different to that of the other interviewees, but is not particularly unusual in Hong Kong terms. He obtained a disappointing overall result in his HKCEE (secondary school) examination, and then spent two years in England studying A-levels to prepare for university entrance. The first year had an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) orientation, and most of Nathan's classmates were from China and Hong Kong. The second year was spent in a mainstream secondary school.

Nathan seems to have enjoyed his overseas study experience, and believes his English improved significantly as a result of it ('that is the place where I believed I learned my English … my English was seriously, literally very bad, when I was in Hong Kong'). He contrasts his approach with that of the other students from Hong Kong in the EFL class, who according to Nathan showed limited curiosity and made few social contacts beyond the confines of the classroom. He observed that his fellow Hong Kong students felt their English was 'good enough' and so they 'didn't learn British style English, they just kept their things'. Nathan is aware of these different motivational and identity orientations, however, and says that this 'is not necessarily a bad thing'.

After the preceding interviews, I felt I needed to get closer to the issue of possible accent models for Hong Kong. As with Jennifer, Nathan's models come from the media, but are also influenced by his stay in the UK. One of these models is the 'current David Beckham', the football star who is also a 'style icon and role model', according to Machin and Van Leeuwen (2005: 586). According to Nathan, who had probably been influenced by numerous media reports around the time of the interview, Beckham had adapted his former London/SE England (or 'Estuary') accent and now 'speaks posh'. Like Jennifer, Nathan has developed a sophisticated awareness of the social semiotics of accent in both local and global terms. Turning to possible Hong Kong role models, Nathan suggested some equally interesting possibilities. The first was Bruce Lee (1940–73), the martial arts icon. Lee has an 'international' background that may also explain his iconic status, for many Hongkongers; he was born in California, grew up mainly in Hong Kong, returned to the US for his university education at the age of 18 and thereafter retained close links with both places.

Lee's accent in the video clip Nathan sent me after the interview can certainly be described as a hybrid, influenced by his language experiences and his training

as an actor. In Lee's well-known sequence 'Be like water, my friend …', some medial /t/ sounds show American-style T-voicing, as in the word *bottle*, while others are more British (as in the word *water*). There is also the influence of Hong Kong and Cantonese: vowels are subtly nuanced, and final consonant clusters are usually simplified in non-native ways (as in *mind* and *friend*). One might speculate that Lee's accent represents a desire not to be easily placed, for personal and professional reasons: neither too American, nor too Hong Kong; not an 'oriental' stereotype, but different enough to suggest the exotic. Many accents of contemporary English suggest just this kind of balancing act, a negative capability that avoids evoking undesirable indexicalities while remaining skilfully non-committal as to what it *does* evoke.

Nathan's English accent is no exception, and it reflects his international experience and orientation. He describes it as being 'kind of weird … it is not British, but it is not Hong Kong, it is somewhere between'. The 'somewhere-between-ness' of Nathan's orientation is both striking and commonplace in Hong Kong. It suggests the 'unmarked' nature of hybridity (Otsuji and Pennycook 2013). Nathan thinks that he possesses accent flexibility, but tends not to use it:

> I can use two accents … I can speak Hong Kong-ly, if you want … but I tend not to use this accent, because I think this accent, I don't know, I just don't like it.

In subsequent communication Nathan provided more detail by saying that he did in fact use a 'Hong Kong' accent when using English words in code-mixing; not to do so would be seen as 'trying too hard'.

The two other Hong Kong accent models suggested by Nathan – an online English tutor and a former English teacher with an online following – are more distinctly British, and even RP-influenced. But again, Nathan's choice of models suggests an orientation towards accent, rather than pronunciation. Nathan first noted the need for a clear distinction by saying, in response to my questions, that 'there's something wrong with the words "pronunciation" and "accent"'. As with Jennifer, 'pronunciation' seems to have connotations of correctness and core features, while 'accent' refers to personal style above and beyond these features. Nathan elaborated the distinction by explaining how he teaches English vowel contrasts to his secondary school tutees: he asks them to pronounce particular words, and then uses an IPA vowel chart as a visual guide, treating it as a map to increase their awareness of vowels and vowel contrasts. His rationale for this is that many Hong Kong speakers use just 'four or five vowels', echoing the 'reduced vowel system' found in some studies of Hong Kong English (e.g. Hung 2000). But importantly, he distinguishes this concern with correctness from matters of accent:

> the reason I did that is because I firmly believed my students could speak … not my students, all Hong Kong people … are able to speak what I call good English. Good English means … a complicated definition, never mind … they can speak good English with their own accent, as long as they understand the chart.

Nathan clearly thinks that 'their own accent' means certain kinds of Hong Kong English accents. Once again, the kind of Hong Kong accent is critical: he believes that Hong Kong people can use this accent to speak 'very good English', presumably as long as reduced vowel systems and the tendency to drop consonants – perhaps belonging to the domain of pronunciation – are avoided. In subsequent communication Nathan added the insight that 'not good' English means 'not understandable or not listenable'. The picture of an acceptable local accent, in pedagogical terms, overlaps considerably with that of an intelligible accent, defined in terms of 'minimal norms' or 'core features' along the lines of Jenkins's LFC (Chapter 4).

It could be argued that Nathan is imposing his own, British-influenced norms on local students. But his concern with 'correctness' has deeper roots than mere imitation. In his university classes, Nathan has observed the intelligibility problems that can occur when non-local teachers encounter Hong Kong students with a low proficiency level:

> currently I think, with respect, I think the teachers don't really understand what we speak. The teachers try incredibly hard to listen to my classmates' English … very often my teachers have to guess what my classmates say … it happens all the time, literally all the time.

These problems may just reflect unfamiliarity with local accents, but it was argued above that certain pronunciation features are likely to reduce both intranational and international intelligibility. The intelligibility studies summarized in Chapter 4 also suggest that 'familiarity' has limited explanatory potential. Like Richard and Jennifer, Nathan is aware of the differences between Hong Kong English accents. He does not see them as inherently less intelligible, and draws on his own experiences to make distinctions between more and less intelligible versions. There is clearly a space for Hong Kong English accents that follow the 'guardrails' or minimal norms of intelligibility, in Nathan's worldview.

In terms of suggestions for teaching, Nathan also displays pedagogical awareness combined with a realistic view of the prevailing normative landscape. His use of the vowel chart with his students resembles the approach of Adrian Underhill and his phonemic chart (Underhill 1994, as mentioned in Chapter 5).[2] As far as possible, Nathan refrains from 'modelling' vowels, instead using non-verbal prompts to elicit or modify students' production. The use of such 'Silent Way' techniques was briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, but what is of interest here is Nathan's reason for remaining silent. With his 'somewhere between' accent, he doubts his ability to provide a suitable model (perhaps he also realizes that passive repetition is not always conducive to learning). This self-developed technique suggests that with appropriate knowledge, metalinguistic awareness and training, local teachers can tackle pronunciation in ways that do not threaten their confidence.

Notes

 1 'Noticeability' is a complex notion and involves several interacting factors. Kerswill
    and Williams (2002: 86–7) use the term 'salience' in a similar way; the salience of a
    feature is increased by frequency, or by occurrence in stressed syllables or in initial
    position. Trudgill (1986) also links salience to participation in phonological contrast.
    Noticeability, or salience, thus reflects many aspects of functional or frequency-based
    approaches to phonology (e.g. Bybee 2001; see also Chapter 4).
 2 After Nathan read my draft interview notes, he tried using the chart with his students
    and told me that it 'helps you to learn quicker and easier, because this chart tells you
    many secrets – how you use the muscles that you do not use when you are speaking
    Cantonese'.

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8   Conclusions

Teaching pronunciation in a globalized world

After journeying through the multiple dimensions of accent and pronunciation, and coming to appreciate their complex and contested nature, we arrive at the realization that we still have to 'do something' in the classroom. Even 'doing nothing' about pronunciation is a kind of position, one with its own advantages and disadvantages. In this final chapter I will draw together some of the strands from previous chapters, recapitulating their main points in order to address the more practical questions of this book: what does it mean to teach English pronunciation in a globalized world? And what can we do to resolve the complexity in a way that benefits learners? The answers cannot be simple, as no two contexts or classrooms are the same; nevertheless, I will attempt to offer some guidelines and principles by using Hong Kong as a case study, before considering the wider implications.

The chapter begins by trying to identify something of the nature of pronunciation teaching and testing in Hong Kong, in order to establish the ground upon which subsequent proposals are made. A recent proposal for pronunciation teaching in Hong Kong is evaluated, drawing on the concepts and arguments introduced earlier in the book. The case is then made for a features-based approach that acknowledges linguistic and sociolinguistic factors, as depicted in the four-quadrant model introduced in Chapter 5. The approach takes on board some of the indications of both WE and ELF, but without reifying a model or variety. Among the features of Hong Kong English accents, some likely candidates for acceptance in pedagogical contexts are identified. The chapter then considers the implications for pronunciation teaching and testing more widely. Although the 'features-based approach' is potentially applicable elsewhere, it is of course insufficient to focus on features. Strategies are also important for enabling learners to cope with global English; a major requirement is for adaptability, the ability to cope with unpredictable situations and trajectories. The importance of meta-knowledge, in both linguistic and sociolinguistic forms, is recognized in this approach.

Teaching and testing pronunciation in Hong Kong

Faced with the linguistic and sociolinguistic complexities of language, and with the difficulties of incorporating this complexity into theory and pedagogy, it is comforting to return to the world of predictable 'local' varieties and identities

that is suggested by the WE paradigm. I will begin this section by summarizing and evaluating the study of pronunciation teaching in Hong Kong carried out by Chan (2014), for two main reasons. First, the study provides some insight into the existing ground of pronunciation teaching in Hong Kong, thus making guidelines easier to formulate. Second, it illustrates the kind of variety-based approach to pronunciation teaching that this book has been arguing against, allowing me to restate some of the book's key points and suggest an alternative orientation.

Chan's study identifies the pronunciation priorities manifested by curriculum documents, test descriptors and commercially available textbooks in Hong Kong. As noted in Chapter 5, it is often difficult to find out what pronunciation teaching actually involves in concrete terms. The analysis yields some useful insights, even if it remains uncertain how far 'official' policies and documented guidelines are implemented in classroom teaching and examinations. The crux of Chan's argument is that while teaching and testing have made some concessions towards global English, the curriculum is 'still guided by NS norms' (Chan 2014: 167). This recalls the viewpoint of Luk and Lin (2006: 13), who identify the 'hegemonic domination of the former colonizer's language and their linguistic norms'. According to Chan, the evidence for this is visible throughout the curriculum: the analysis of textbooks finds that 'accurate pronunciation' refers exclusively to 'NS-correctness' (2014: 161), while the term 'problem' is applied to 'numerous typical HKE [Hong Kong English] segmental features'. Following a common ELF line of argument, this is undesirable because 'NS pronunciations' are 'largely irrelevant in ELF communication' (p. 167). The ELF alternative, we are told, is also preferred because it is 'highly attainable', although no evidence is provided for this claim.

Let us examine the evidence for the 'NS-correctness' argument. As highlighted in this book, such claims rest first of all on the assumption that 'NS' or 'native' features can easily be separated from 'non-native' features, whether the latter are viewed individually or as part of bounded entities such as 'HKE' and 'ELF'. The contradictions of the variety approach, as noted by Benor (2010), start to appear: we are required to accept, for instance, that not making a contrast between /n/ and /l/ is a 'Hong Kong' feature, while making such a contrast is a 'native speaker', 'non-local' feature. This shows the effects of the reification, essentialism and polarization that are inherent to the variety approach. The three-sided triangle of NS, WE and ELF, described in relation to the models debate in Chapter 5, is clearly visible here, and its relational meanings are used to separate accent and pronunciation features into categories. In a table, Chan (2014: 162) lists thirteen segmental features that are highlighted in a Hong Kong textbook called *English Skills Plus*. Chan's claim of 'NS-correctness' therefore derives from the implication that these 'common' features of HKE are treated as problems in textbooks such as *English Skills Plus*, and are features that the textbook writers 'claim should be avoided', according to Chan (2014: 161).

Apart from the fact that these 'common' features do not always turn out to be so common, when we look more closely at their distribution (see Chapter 7), the central problem with Chan's claim is that most of them also turn out to be

problematic for intelligibility. Among the thirteen features, there are two vowel features singled out for attention, the long/short /iː, ɪ/ 'quantity' contrast and the /æ, e/ 'quality' contrast. The eleven consonantal features include contrasts such as /r, l/, /l, n/ and /v, w/, initial clusters such as the /kl/ in *clothing*, and final clusters such as /vd/ in *lived* and /kt/ in *packed*. Despite Chan's argument that prioritizing these in instruction represents a 'native speaker', rather than a 'Hong Kong' orientation, what they actually represent is an intelligibility orientation: if one compares these features with Jenkins's (2000) LFC criteria, supplemented by the arguments made in this book for the role of functional factors, what actually transpires is that the majority of these so-called 'NS' features are crucial for intelligibility in international communication. Among the eleven HKE consonantal features that are mentioned or implied by the table, nine are clearly indicated as being problematic by the LFC, and several were also implicated in the HKE intelligibility data presented earlier. For example, the features include /v/ substitution, something which violates the LFC's requirements for consonantal contrasts. This 'HKE' feature also reduced intranational intelligibility in the case of *virtually*, as well as significantly reducing acceptability (see Chapter 7).

So although Chan (2014: 163) characterizes these features as 'typical HKE phonological features', implying that they should not be viewed through the lens of an 'extraneous, monolithic, monolingual NS norm' (p. 147), that they should not be 'stigmatised in the speaking tasks' (p. 167), something interesting happens when we look at them through the lens of the LFC criteria, as suggested by Chan himself (p. 147): at least ten of the thirteen 'features' are problematic for international intelligibility. They should in fact be 'stigmatized' from a 'lingua franca' perspective, in the sense of being prioritized for attention in instruction. Contrary to Chan's contention that the textbook is preoccupied with 'NS-correctness', the prioritization process in *English Skills Plus* suggests an awareness of which 'HKE' features are likely to reduce intelligibility. If we attach any importance to intelligibility, in the majority of cases the textbook writers are right to imply that these features should be avoided; the only doubtful case is the attention given to dental fricative or TH sounds.

If we recall that the LFC research was based on communicative interaction between non-native speakers, we realize that the so-called 'NS' features are not native-speaker features at all, but are rather those which are widely used to maintain international intelligibility. In the polarized view that results from the reification of 'varieties', both 'NS' and 'HKE' accents and their features end up being misrepresented. This was anticipated in Chapter 1, when I noted the tendency for meanings such as 'local' and 'global', 'better' and 'worse', to be played out on the terrain of vowels and consonants. Again, it is not my intention to single out Chan's work for special attention. A similar rhetorical polarization can be seen in much of the advocacy-oriented ELF literature. As linguistic entrepreneurs of all kinds have long realized, the idealized and ideologized language 'variety', once hitched to various 'good'/'bad' polarities such as pluricentric/monocentric, internal/external and postcolonial/colonial, is an effective weapon in the campaign to mobilize public opinion. If we move beyond these labels and look at the features involved,

the situation is more nuanced. It is also a lot more prosaic. Rather than the triumph of 'democracy over imperialism' (Kirkpatrick 2006: 76), we have the result of everyday acts of intelligibility, encouraged by the centripetal influences of literacy and written English.

Apart from avoiding the problems of over-polarization, exemplified by Chan's article, I mentioned in Chapter 6 the other main reason for moving beyond the contradictions of the variety approach: it tends to undermine its own aims by alienating local users. In this case, the kind of 'HKE' that is characterized by Chan's undifferentiated list of 'typical' features is unlikely to be accepted by local users; this much is indicated by the acceptability data in Chapter 7. In addition to the general indications of intelligibility and acceptability, the interview data show that students distinguish between different kinds of 'HKE', and appear to make an intelligibility-based distinction between accent and pronunciation. Moreover, the review of local language ideologies in Chapter 6 suggests that a WE-style 'HKE' strategy is unlikely to achieve success. If we consider the likely reactions of teachers, principals and parents – not to mention bureaucrats and language planners – the pursuit of the 'typical' accent satisfies the analyst's desire for distinctiveness, but the entity that emerges is handicapped in terms of its persuasive power and pedagogical acceptability. Instead of this tactic, a more subtle strategy is needed, one that exploits the ability of certain features to 'fly under the radar' and largely escape people's attention. In the next section I will explain in more detail how this can be done, with the aim of showing how local variation can be accommodated in a pedagogically sustainable manner.

Priorities for pronunciation teaching in Hong Kong

Applying a features-based approach thus means moving beyond the distorting effects of variety labels. It means avoiding the tendency, visible in much WE and ELF research, to systematize 'typical' features and associate them with particular groups or particular types of interaction. Before identifying and prioritizing features, a few caveats regarding the terms 'features-based' and 'prioritization' are needed. First, although I am trying to give general guidelines, following the principles of the four-quadrant model, my perceptions are inevitably influenced by my own experiences of teaching English pronunciation. For the last few years this has taken place with English-major undergraduates in Hong Kong. These students tend to have above-average levels of proficiency, although they usually do not come from either 'elite' or traditionally 'academic' backgrounds – something that also influences the proposals I make here. Teachers in different contexts, even in Hong Kong, may find my suggestions either too conservative or too radical.

The important point about prioritization is that it is always context-specific. It depends on factors such as the time available, the motivation and proficiency level of the students, and their likely future needs. The process of prioritization is made even more difficult in the era of global English, as needs are unpredictable. But if we cannot predict what our students will need or want to do in their life

trajectories, the best we can do is to try and give them as much flexibility and adaptability as possible. Pronunciation instruction needs to increase students' ability to deal with unpredictability, by providing appropriate strategies and enhancing communicative confidence. With this in mind, one of the benefits of prioritization is that it frees up time for activities that develop this ability, instead of spending it on pointless drills or dispiriting corrections.

Second, while a features-based approach is necessary, it is not sufficient, and may even be counter-productive if it is applied in a mechanical fashion. Too much of a focus on features is probably worse than too little, when students need to develop communicative confidence first and foremost. Priorities need to take account of different stages of learning. The danger of features-based approaches is that once enthusiasts for description and sticklers for 'correctness' have entered the pedagogical equation, students will end up being oppressed by 'features'. Ideologies of educational stratification are of course very keen on lists of features, the nature of which serves further stratification. In classroom practice, teachers of English will often encounter pronunciation 'problems' that students cannot address because they cannot hear certain contrasts. While this ability can be developed over time, there is no better way to demotivate and slow down a class by drawing too much attention to the lack of such contrasts in students' pronunciation.

Here I will outline the main indications of a features-based approach to pronunciation teaching in Hong Kong, and will return to more general strategies in a later section of this chapter. Under a features-based approach, instead of the oppositional categories of 'NS' and 'local' – rhetorically appealing, but ontologically untenable and strategically ineffective – there are three possible groupings that emerge in the process of prioritization. First, there are features that are currently prioritized in mainstream pronunciation teaching and testing, and which evidence suggests should continue to be prioritized. Second, there are features that are currently prioritized, but need not be. Third, there may be local accent features that fall outside these two broad categories – ones that are not currently mentioned in descriptors, but which can be accepted (rather than penalised) and can also form part of a more inclusive characterization of English accents in the local context.

The first category of features represents those associated with 'traditional' models and descriptions. Intelligibility research provides an initial guide to prioritization. Despite its attachment to 'difference' and its invocation of 'new norms', the LFC research in fact suggests that most of the segmental features and contrasts of existing descriptions and models are in fact needed for international intelligibility. This is particularly so when viewed in the light of the theoretical considerations regarding function and frequency outlined in Chapter 4. Even in lingua franca situations, speakers tend to converge on regular solutions to the 'co-ordination problem' of achieving intelligibility (see Croft 2000: 97). This convergence is arguably what the LFC demonstrates – not, as is often assumed, that non-native speakers are developing a 'different' phonology, but rather that the solutions used by speakers of English are by and large very similar, in terms of phonological contrasts.

The second category of features – candidates for de-prioritization – emerges from a consideration of these functional and intelligibility-related factors, assisted by insights from WE and ELF research. The central argument of such research is that not all of the features of 'traditional' models are needed, for two main reasons: L1-related and locally influenced patterns and modifications are inevitable, and not all of these reduce intelligibility. However, in the light of what has been said so far about intelligibility, a fairly short list of features emerges. If we take the table supplied by Chan (2014: 162) as an initial guide to what is currently being prioritized in Hong Kong, the dental fricative or TH sounds /ð/ and /θ/ emerge as almost the only consonantal candidates for de-prioritization. Here I will apply the four-quadrant approach to see why this is so, and to evaluate the situation in the Hong Kong context.

We can conclude that the common substitutions of the dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ found in Hong Kong, [d] and [f] respectively, are relatively frequent (quadrant 1); substitutions of the voiced TH /ð/ with [d] were among the only 'HKE' features used by a majority of speakers in the mini-corpus data. They do not appear to threaten intelligibility (quadrant 2), as suggested by Jenkins's LFC criteria and the functional considerations outlined in Chapter 4, supplemented by the intelligibility data. The acceptability data did not indicate any problems in this area (quadrant 4). Returning to quadrant 1 in order to compare the two sounds (voiced and voiceless TH, /ð/ and /θ/), a distributional difference is that the voiced TH sound occurs mainly in unstressed positions, such as in the function word *the*. Many substitutions and variants will not even be noticed because they are non-salient. The voiceless TH sound /θ/, on the other hand, occurs in high-frequency content words such as *think, three* and *month*; there is perhaps more chance that substitutions will be noticed. Arguing along similar lines, Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006: 396) believe that the substitution of [t] for /θ/ – a common pattern in Southeast and South Asia – may cause problems for listeners from 'more distant parts of Asia'. Young (2003) and Date (2005), non-native speakers from China and Japan respectively, report 'intelligibility incidents' from their residence abroad; Young heard as *You dig tree tree* the utterance *You take 33* when asking for directions in Singapore, and Date heard *trill* and *taught* for *thrill* and *thought*, also in Singapore. It is possible that this sound should have a slightly higher priority in pronunciation instruction, but generally we can still concur with the advice given by Gillian Brown in 1974, namely that when time is short it is probably not worth spending time on either of the dental fricatives (Brown 1974: 53).

In addition to these segmental features, there are of course other candidates for de-prioritization at the suprasegmental level. As noted in Chapter 5, one of the main contentions of Jenkins's LFC is that many suprasegmental features – for example, vowel reduction and weak forms, linking phenomena and some aspects of intonation – are non-core and not worth teaching for productive competence. Again, decisions depend on the pedagogical situation. As with Brown's advice for the dental fricatives, if time is short there may be little point focusing on these areas. This is so for several reasons: connected speech phenomena such as vowel reduction and weak forms are highly variable, and depend on speakers'

perceptions of the desirable balance between economy and clarity. They are also likely to be acquired automatically, as speakers learn to negotiate this continuum; teaching them too soon may cause learners to over-use them, or use them in ways that unintentionally reduce intelligibility. Some knowledge of these features may assist with receptive competence, however, and should form part of the metalinguistic knowledge of learners. This is a point that is argued further in a later section of this chapter.

Turning to the third category of features, are there any other possible contenders for acceptance? In other words, are there distinctive and recurring features that are prevalent in local accents, and which may be penalized in teaching and testing even though they do not threaten intelligibility or acceptability? The four-quadrant approach suggests that there are several such features in Hong Kong; here I will focus on two, for reasons that will become clearer in the following section on testing. First, there is the tendency to use full vowels instead of reduced ones in some unstressed syllables. Thus *confused* may have an [ɒ] vowel in the first syllable instead of a schwa [ə] . To begin with quadrant 1, it is important to restate the fact that this is only a tendency – Hong Kong speakers also make use of vowel reduction, and there is considerable inter-speaker and intra-speaker variation. As was pointed out in Chapter 4, if word stress patterns are maintained this is unlikely to cause intelligibility problems. In fact, Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006: 406) argue that using full vowels may serve to *increase* intelligibility. It is possible that it does so by making pronunciation more like spelling, adding to the case I am building here for taking the influence of written language into account. In terms of acceptability, the lack of reduced vowels may sound strange or unnatural to native speaker listeners. But 'sounding strange' is not a very persuasive argument, and language does not have a 'natural' home. There are more persuasive counter-arguments in terms of increasing intelligibility for non-native speakers, and reducing the time spent on 'correcting' unproblematic features.

Second, certain kinds of final consonant cluster simplification can also be accepted. The simplification of final clusters is a universal feature of spoken English, and we first need to distinguish problematic from unproblematic simplification. The teaching materials studied by Chan (2014: 162) advise against the acceptance of consonant cluster simplifications involving grammatical information, such as –ed endings, and I think they are right to do so. Inflectional endings tend to inhibit simplification in a wide range of English accents (Schreier 2009), and this may be connected with intelligibility. Low (2010: 248) reports the findings of Setter (2005), namely that 'final consonant clusters appeared to be missing in Singapore English and that this posed a problem for intelligibility'. Once again, Chan's argument – that the targeting of cluster simplification reveals an 'NS-centred' attitude – does not stand up to much scrutiny if we take an intelligibility perspective. In Chapter 7, the acceptability data also highlighted the effects of simplifications in the inflectional endings of *relaxed* and *confused*.

Of course, there are also unproblematic forms of final cluster simplification that occur widely in Hong Kong, that do not threaten intelligibility, and which will

generally not be noticed much of the time. This makes them ideal candidates for the 'under the radar' strategy being advocated here. One such form of simplification often occurs in non-inflected words with more than two syllables, and can be seen in the accent samples presented in Chapter 7: *commitment* and *department* were pronounced without the final /t/. Native speakers would probably not simplify the clusters in these environments (the words were followed by pauses, making simplification more noticeable). Simplification in these cases seems highly unlikely to affect intelligibility, as there is ample phonological information and the word is probably already activated in listeners' mental lexicons by the time the final /t/ is reached. There is no grammatical information pertaining to the /t/ sound in these cases. If we apply the four-quadrant model in its more dynamic, developmental sense, we could say that without paying too much conscious attention, the speakers have explored the boundaries and effects of simplification in the 'learning' and 'interaction' temporal frames. They are negotiating the clarity/economy continuum in their own way; these modifications extend the scope of economy, while not compromising intelligibility or acceptability. It is doubtful whether these simplifications would even be noticed, unless by over-zealous assessors whose training predisposes them to look for different or 'missing' sounds.

The implication of 'problematic' and 'unproblematic' final cluster simplification is that instruction still needs to focus on consonant clusters in mono- and bisyllabic words, or words where the cluster carries grammatical information. The intelligibility data reported in Chapter 7 offers cases in point: the words *cards, concept* and *want* caused significant problems, largely because of modification to the final consonant clusters. The 'informational' nature of intelligibility suggests that in shorter words, deleting consonants is likely to cause problems.

At first glance, then, the consideration of 'features' indicates few departures from existing models. It may be that global English has relatively few implications for pronunciation teaching at this level of analysis; perhaps this reflects Saraceni's (2010: 33) contention, that the notion of 'relocating' English cannot be cultivated 'on the terrain of language form'. However, a features-based approach, combined with the kind of prioritization process outlined by the four-quadrant model, does lead to the pragmatic acceptance of certain aspects of local variation. This represents a compromise of sorts: it acknowledges WE and ELF findings, while trying not to activate ideological schemata relating to 'standard language' or 'linguistic purity'. The 'local' features that are accepted, in the sense of being de-prioritized, will not even be noticed much of the time.

The adoption of features, rather than varieties, as the units of analysis also serves as a corrective to the polarization and reification of the models debate. It is not the case that so-called 'NS' norms are 'irrelevant', as Chan (2014) appears to believe, and that 'HKE' constitutes the shared repertoire of the local community. This kind of polarization does not reflect the complexities of local/global interactions, and is strategically unhelpful. In addition, if it is literacy and written English that largely maintains the relevance of core features, rather than the lurking ghost of the native speaker, de-polarization is further achieved. The

task is not to replace one variety with another, but to review patterns of feature use, identifying the features and contrasts that are most useful for the situations in which learners are likely to find themselves. This indirectly leads to an acceptance of many aspects of local variation, without the ideological imperative to reify a model or variety.

It may be argued that the recommendations above have actually arrived at a similar destination to those of ELF research, and this is true to a certain extent. But there is significance in having taken a different route to *reach* the destination. To minimize the ideological effects of boundary-drawing (see Gal and Irvine 1995), the route has avoided the inherent reification of labels such as 'ELF'. Even the term 'lingua franca approach' that I have adopted elsewhere (Sewell forthcoming) may confer too much distinctiveness on 'lingua franca' communication. As argued in Chapter 2, it is not a case of there being English *as* a lingua franca, but rather that English *is* a lingua franca for all of its users. There is no such thing as 'a lingua franca' in the sense of a bounded entity. There are only the languaging practices of human beings, from which we try to extract patterns of regularity for pedagogical purposes – on features-based, not variety-based, terms. Raising the flags of 'ELF' or 'Hong Kong English' may appear to have greater rhetorical power, but it also involves contradictions that the features-based approach tries to overcome.

Testing pronunciation

Recommendations for language teaching often seem vague, because priorities can be interpreted and implemented in different ways. Looking at language testing provides a more detailed insight into the exact nature of 'priorities', and may in turn allow us be more explicit about the pedagogical indications of global English. Several researchers (e.g. Jenkins 2006) have adopted the general position that 'non-standard' but communicatively effective features of English should not be penalized in language tests. Once again, the discourses of WE and ELF have tended to rely on binary distinctions between 'NS' and either 'local' or 'ELF' norms. In Hong Kong, Chan (2014) notes the possibility of a 'continuing conservative orientation towards (NS-based) language correctness in public assessments', one which diverges from 'the ideology of linguistic pluricentricity in WE and ELF' (Chan 2014: 154). As we have already seen, the ideological polarization of language into 'NS-based', 'local' or 'ELF' varieties overstates the differences between them, and understates the variation within them. The version of 'HKE' phonology presented by Chan (2014) secures distinctiveness, but at the expense of intelligibility; the boundary-drawing move also erases the existence of less distinctive but more intelligible Hong Kong features.

As with teaching, we need to get some idea of what current practice actually consists of before anything meaningful can be said. In this section I will briefly summarize the findings of a study I carried out in Hong Kong, one that analysed examiner comments from a local English examination (see Sewell 2013 for more detail). The aim of the study was to find out whether the general orientation of the comments was towards 'NS' norms, as Chan suggests it may be, or whether

they were in fact compatible with the requirements of international intelligibility. The Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers of English, or LPATE, was introduced in 2001. A pass in the examination has to be secured by local teachers who wish to teach English in Hong Kong's secondary schools. In terms of pronunciation, this means achieving Level 3 or above on a five-level scale:

- Level 5: Reads in a fully comprehensible way with no systematic errors in pronunciation and uses stress and intonation in a very natural way.
- Level 4: Reads in a comprehensible way with few systematic errors in pronunciation and uses stress and intonation in a mostly natural way.
- Level 3: Reads in a generally comprehensible way, though may make errors in pronunciation. Uses stress and intonation to convey meaning, though may occasionally sound unnatural.
- Level 2: Does not read in a consistently comprehensible way due to errors in pronunciation, stress and intonation and speech is frequently hesitant.
- Level 1: Makes frequent errors in pronunciation, stress and intonation which cause confusion for the listener.

(Education Bureau 2010: 71)

These are summarized descriptors, and examiners have access to more complex versions in the examination. Making due allowance for this, there appear to be two problematic terms in the descriptors: 'errors' and 'natural'. As we have seen, from a perspective that emphasizes the existence of variation in Hong Kong accents, there may well be Hong Kong features that can reasonably be classed as 'errors' if they are likely to affect international or intranational intelligibility. On the other hand, there may be 'systematic' aspects of local pronunciation, such as the substitution of [d] for the voiced TH sound /ð/, certain forms of final cluster simplification, or the non-reduction of vowels, that do not affect intelligibility and therefore have a case to be seen as unproblematic 'features' – if indeed they are noticed in the first place.

Chan (2014: 154) quotes the descriptors for another examination, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), as a further example of current practices in language testing. Attaining level 7 (the highest level) of the speaking examination means that the candidate '[p]ronounces all sounds/sound clusters and words clearly and accurately' (HKEAA 2012: 160, in Chan 2014: 154). This appears to go too far in the 'clarity' direction and ignores the fact that all speakers reduce certain clusters; Hong Kong students in my classes have enjoyed watching video clips of various well-known international figures and realizing that not even they would attain top marks in the HKDSE. But although there appears to be scope for revisiting the error/feature distinction in the LPATE descriptors, my analysis indicated that examiners do in fact focus their attention on the segmental features that would be expected to cause intelligibility problems. For example, instances of final cluster simplification noted as 'problematic' often involved monosyllabic words, in which simplification often creates possible ambiguity (e.g. pronouncing *paint* as *pain*). I think the examiners do this naturally, again

because these simplifications are more noticeable (they may also have had visible effects in the classrooms which were being observed for this examination).

Another problematic area of the LPATE descriptors is intonation. Here the term 'natural' may be misleading, as it suggests universal patterns and perhaps associates 'naturalness' with 'nativeness'. My analysis showed that examiners have noted instances in which patterns differ from 'typical' or 'native speaker' patterns, for example by having rising intonation on wh- questions such as *What's the time?* This seems unlikely to affect intelligibility, and there seems to be no other reason to insist on a native-like pattern – especially as these patterns are also variable, and the 'typical' patterns yielded by descriptive studies are subject to exceptions. The HKDSE descriptors do a better job of characterizing the target; to achieve Level 7, a candidate needs to use intonation 'with some sophistication to enhance communication' (HKEAA 2012: 160, in Chan 2014: 154). There is no suggestion of 'naturalness' or of conformity to a native-like target, at least in theory.

The LPATE examiners' comments also occasionally refer to features that have been identified here as candidates for de-prioritization. One of these is the absence of vowel reduction, discussed in the section above. For example, one such comment referred to the 'common problem' of 'giving stress to the weak vowel sounds as in "chocolate", "carrot" and "ceremony"' (HKEAA 2005). In Hong Kong, the word *chocolate* would often be pronounced with a full vowel such as [eɪ] in the final syllable, rather than the schwa [ə] of the dictionary form. There might even be three syllables instead of two (as in most dictionaries), in which case the 'extra' vowel could be [oʊ]). This kind of pronunciation can be defended on the grounds that it makes word recognition easier for non-native speakers: it puts back the phonological information that 'weak vowel sounds' take out, and involves a clearer sound-spelling relationship. There seems to be no reason to insist on vowel reduction here, as long as word stress patterns are largely maintained.

The recommendation for teaching and testing that emerges at this point is quite simple: students, or examination candidates, should not be penalized for using forms that differ from 'traditional' models, as long as they do not detract from intelligibility; other criteria from the four-quadrant model may also strengthen the arguments for acceptance, as demonstrated in the case of the dental fricatives. Variation in these areas can be accepted; there is no question of enforcing either variant or of suggesting that one is more authentically 'Hong Kong'. But by and large, the evidence from Hong Kong suggests that teaching materials and test descriptors are already more concerned with intelligibility than with nativeness. The targets for reform are less obvious than those summoned up by the polarized rhetoric of WE and ELF.

Pronunciation teaching: approaches, strategies, activities

One of the central arguments of this book has been that studies of features can reveal some of the more 'systematic' aspects of spoken communication, even in unpredictable global English interactions, and can still play a role in establishing priorities for teaching and testing. But as mentioned above, features are an

insufficient basis for teaching pronunciation in a globalized world. The more 'emergent' aspects of communication suggest that we need to supply our students with appropriate strategies, and design effective activities to increase linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge.

I will begin this section by considering some general approaches to pronunciation teaching. The first such approach might be called the 'zero position' – let it develop naturally, through interaction. To a certain extent, the zero position follows logically from the argument of Schneider (2007: 315) – people who *need* to develop international intelligibility probably will, of their own accord and through their own activities. However, I prefer to see this as an argument for prioritization, rather than for the abandonment of pronunciation teaching. The zero position also arises from what I would claim is a misinterpretation of WE and ELF research. For example, Kopperoinen (2011: 90) suggests that students can be 'told explicitly that their own accents are acceptable', without any indication of what kinds of accents or accent features are involved. Even if we acknowledge the general import of the WE and ELF positions, this does not mean abandoning the attempt to establish priorities, and to distinguish between 'local accents' and 'careless speech' (Luk and Lin 2006: 17).

The nativeness principle, on the other hand, seems to represent the diametric opposite of the zero position: learners need to study pronunciation in order to sound native-like. In Chapter 5 there was a brief consideration of this principle, and I concluded that it has doubtful relevance in most contexts. Even if students wish to sound native-like – and what they actually mean by 'native-like' must be carefully considered – the 'under the radar' strategy and the features-based, intelligibility-oriented approach I am advocating here are probably more efficient ways to go about it. There is often little point spending time on features that few people will notice or are especially hard to learn. The nativeness principle also explains why sociolinguists sometimes appear to advocate a zero position, as if by way of a reaction. The ESL classroom observations of Doerr (2009), mentioned in Chapter 5, are again useful in this regard. According to Doerr, one of the things that the teacher's classroom interventions taught the students was that there are 'correct' and 'incorrect' pronunciations; this, however, is seen to contradict the orthodox sociolinguistic view that 'language always has variations that are all linguistically correct', and that correctness is 'decided mainly by social factors rather than linguistic factors' (2009: 195).

As I have argued in this book, language teaching, and pronunciation teaching, needs to critically engage with the issue of 'correctness' in order to avoid inappropriate or inefficient methods and procedures. But equally, sociolinguistics also needs to deal with the limitations of the sociolinguistic orthodoxy if it is to participate in dialogues with language teaching. Language teachers who have taught classes with students from different language backgrounds will have encountered some of the difficulties of understanding that can occur – between teachers and students, and among students themselves. The role played by pronunciation in this is often considerable, and for the teacher to offer no guidance at all seems unethical. There are ways in which 'correctness' can be

associated with linguistic factors such as intelligibility, as long as this is not over-applied; putting this into practice constitutes an ongoing challenge for pronunciation teaching.

This brings us to the overall approach that is indicated by the arguments of this book: a version of the intelligibility principle, under which students are prepared to communicate with as wide a range of people, and in as wide a range of situations, as possible. Looking at recent proposals, there are different ways to implement this approach. One involves a traditional interpretation of the local/global polarity, according to which intelligibility is mainly needed for 'global' interaction; what takes over at the 'local' level is the expression of identity. This approach can be seen in the work of Low (2010), who considers alternative pronunciation models for Singapore. The guiding principles relate to the Cultural Orientation Model of Alsagoff (2007, 2010), briefly introduced in Chapter 2. Accordingly, 'the desire to be internationally intelligible caters to the globalist orientation', and this orientation is represented by 'international standard English'. The local orientation, on the other hand, means expressing 'our local identities', and for this Singaporeans 'have to speak local Singapore English' (Low 2010: 250).

Could a similar approach be adopted in Hong Kong? With its acknowledgement of identity, as well as intelligibility, it seems be closely aligned with the four-quadrant approach. There may be some utility in the 'local/global' distinction, as long as we remain aware of its complexities. The problem, from the perspective of Hong Kong and from that of the arguments made so far, is that establishing consensus about 'local identity' and 'local English' is all but impossible. If we remind ourselves of polycentricity (Blommaert 2010), of Maher's (2005, 2010) concept of metroethnicity, and of the various manifestations of super-diversity, then the top-down interpretation of 'identity' becomes problematic (although there may of course be an *intention* to establish some kind of institutionally-approved 'local identity').

In any case, I would expect Hong Kong students to react quite strongly if they were given a list of features that are 'needed to preserve local identity' (Low 2010: 251). The likely outcome would be that they would reject top-down interpretations of identity and language use, continuing to adopt innovative practices and outpacing linguists' and teachers' understanding of these practices. The interventions of linguists may even have the opposite effect to that desired; they are definitely not 'cool' in the way that Maher (2005) envisages. Yet another consideration is that intelligibility does not only apply to the 'global' dimension; it also affects local communication, as indicated by the data in Chapter 7. This may be particularly true when what is being communicated is formal or complex in nature, and the formal nature of much intra-ethnic English use in Hong Kong is indicated by the study of Evans (2011), mentioned in Chapter 6.

As a partial resolution of these issues, what I wish to propose here is an interpretation of the intelligibility principle that does not involve this kind of predetermined distinction between the 'local' and the 'global', and does not rely on 'local varieties' to maintain this distinction. This proposal will also serve to draw together some of the strands that have been appearing in recent

chapters of this book. The approach prioritizes intelligibility, but not because of an assumption that English is mainly needed for 'global' purposes. Rather, it is partly because of the connection between intelligibility and *written* language, first introduced in Chapter 4. My response to the critique of phonocentrism, as applied to pronunciation teaching, is to reconsider the links between spoken and written language. This follows on from the discussion of functional load in Chapter 4, and is also inspired by Wallace's (2002) case for 'literate English'. This not only occurs in written form, but is used in formal spoken contexts as well (Wallace 2002: 114). It is not the same as native-speaker English or standard English (Wallace 2002: 105), but is:

> a supranational global English which does not necessarily emanate in any direct way from the centre, as suggested in over-polarized accounts of centre versus periphery English … Transnational English will need, not to be reduced or simplified, as some accounts of its role as a lingua franca seem to suggest, but on the contrary, to be elaborated to take account both of its likely expository function in formal settings, and of the reduction in shared world knowledge that is associated with transcultural exchanges.
>
> (Wallace 2002: 105–6)

Literate English, according to Wallace, is the kind of English that 'best serves the needs of its users for the twenty-first century (p. 101). The approach succeeds in shifting the focus away from a preoccupation with 'NS' English, which – as I have argued throughout this book – forms the easy and yet misleading target of many 'critical' approaches to global English, WE and ELF included. And yet the adoption of literate English has a serious critical or emancipatory aim. It is intended to 'resist global tyranny with global means' (Wallace 2002: 114), serving a 'talking back' role of resistance (p. 108) – resistance that includes the undermining of hegemonic 'native speaker' constructs in language teaching and testing. Such activity is not possible with an 'instructional "lingua franca" model of English which restricts communication to immediate, utilitarian contexts' (Wallace 2002: 108).

After the many critiques of reification made in this book, there should be no need to emphasize the fact that 'literate English' is not a variety or even a register; it is an approach towards teaching that recognizes both the immediate usefulness and the critical and emancipatory potential of literacy in its widest sense. In pronunciation teaching, such an approach means recognizing the connections between speech and writing, and acknowledging that they are interrelated systems (Katamba 2005). It means focusing on the features that affect speakers' ability to make themselves understood and realize a variety of meanings – in different contexts, with different listeners, and with different topics, but with an emphasis on expanding repertoires and increasing flexibility. To employ Halliday's (2002) term, the focus is perhaps more on semiodiversity – the diversity of meaning potential – than on glossodiversity, or the diversity of languages and language varieties.

Strategies for teaching and learning

What therefore seems to be needed, by way of an overall strategy for pronunciation teaching, is some way of prioritizing features – much as was performed above in the case of Hong Kong – and of complementing this linguistic knowledge with meta-knowledge of various kinds. I use the term meta-knowledge here to mean an awareness of 'what we are trying to do or are being called upon to do' (Gee 2012: 177). Meta-knowledge comes in more linguistic forms, such as the use of terminology to describe accent and pronunciation features, and in more sociolinguistic forms, where it involves an awareness of purpose and audience, and of the factors that affect accent variation and its reception.

In general terms, the strategy being advocated here is one of 'repertoire expansion' (Ferguson 2009). This addresses the need for adaptability and flexibility in global English encounters and contexts, by emphasizing situation-specific effectiveness. A focus on repertoires is incompatible with a variety approach, in whatever guise. Instead of 'Hong Kong English', the features of Hong Kong English accents – in the plural, reflecting the diversity of the local – are taken into account in curriculum design. In understanding this 'post-variety' mode, it is perhaps instructive to refer to researchers' and teachers' experiences with African-American VernacularEnglish (AAVE) in the US. Benor (2010: 173) cites several sources (Walters 1996; Wolfram 2007; Queen and Baptista 2008) in support of the contention that presenting AAVE as a separate, unified system may be seen as 'suspect and problematic' by African Americans. Benor (2010: 173) found that what was more favourably received was a repertoire approach, one that emphasized the 'variable and selective incorporation of a repertoire of distinctive features'.

As Ferguson (2009: 130) notes, a repertoire approach is opposed to the 'error eradication' mindset that arises from a fixation on 'standard language'. The definition of 'error' moves away from a focus on departures from 'native speaker' or 'standard' forms, and towards a concern with what affects intelligibility and communicative effectiveness in particular contexts. This takes the focus away from uncritical 'accuracy' and relocates it in more interesting areas such as stance and style, and intercultural communication. Pronunciation teaching could involve students being allowed to play with different identities, without them being immediately judged and ranked in terms of 'deviation' from the standard. The existence of the standard/non-standard polarity is not denied, and some focus on form is of course needed, but not in the way suggested by the 'language as subject' approach (see Widdowson 1994, in Jenkins 2015: 121). As mentioned above, literate English is not the same thing as a monolithic 'standard English'.

This can be seen from another strategy I have mentioned before, and which also forms part of the approach: 'under the radar' simply means focusing on features that are noticeable, and mainly ignoring those that are not. This strategy exploits the power of certain language features to hide themselves in speakers' repertoires. By leaving these features alone, by accepting variation in these areas in teaching and testing, there is more time to spend on the features that

matter – features that reduce intelligibility, or that are likely to be noticeable and to reduce students' ability to move in different sociolinguistic environments. In the Hong Kong context, the data in Chapter 7, and the perspective offered by the four-quadrant model, suggests that many of these features – the avoidance of vowel reduction, and certain kinds of final cluster simplification, for example – are already established in speakers' repertoires at different levels of proficiency. As a pragmatic expedient, the 'under the radar' strategy also avoids activating ideological schemata relating to 'non-standard' or 'impure' language.

This aspect of the approach accommodates intelligibility, but learners will also need to place this within an overall frame of effectiveness or acceptability. What is 'better' or 'worse' depends on the purpose of the interaction, or the relationship between the participants (the notions of genre and register are also relevant here). This requires sociolinguistic meta-knowledge. Discussion of variation in performance will often lead to discussion not only of which linguistic forms are important, but also of why they are important: of who is able to impose norms of linguistic behavior and why, of the role played by sociohistorical factors and ideologies of language, and so on. 'Ideology' is perhaps the wrong term to use in this context as it may be seen as contentious, but it becomes inevitable once we acknowledge the relationships between self and society, and the importance of these relationships for learning (Gee 2012: 170).

As a way to gain access to ideologies of language, we can rely on the fact that they become visible whenever language-related topics appear in the media. In one of the accent stories introduced in Chapter 1, the politician's assertion that 'everyone has their own accents' makes for an engaging discussion with more advanced learners, juxtaposed with the columnist's plea for people not to 'abuse' the English language. Here we have the public-discourse equivalents of description and prescription in a Hong Kong context, reflecting different ideologies of language, orientations towards power, and conceptions of 'better' and 'worse'. By discussing these issues, students can be made more aware of the effects of language variation in their own lives, while developing a critical orientation towards prevailing language attitudes.

Accent variation and reactions towards this variation provide rich material for critical discussion of these issues. Rather than deciding in advance how a 'local identity' is expressed with a particular variety, discussion can cover the kinds of local identities that are expressible with different forms and accent features. Given Benson's (2000: 374) characterization of Hong Kong English as involving knowledge of the regional context, rather than of a regional variety, questions for critical language awareness include: would someone from outside the local area or region understand this utterance? Does it matter, in this situation? What purposes, roles or indexicalities – solidarity, insider status, international orientation, for example – are served by different forms? An awareness of the local/translocal, exclusive/inclusive dimensions can thus be integrated into language teaching, at the appropriate stage. The outsider/insider distinction need not be seen as conflictual; in fact, a dimension of 'meaning' that is often neglected in language teaching is that of *who* is

likely to be included or excluded by the meanings we assume. Awareness of these dimensions is important, and helps to increase students' motivation and involvement by using their own 'local' knowledge as part of the input for critical discussion, supplemented by the (possibly) more 'worldly' knowledge of the teacher.

An initial objection to the kinds of strategies outlined above relates to time constraints – what if there is insufficient time to spend on pronunciation teaching, let alone to discuss the effects of accent variation? In this case, the intelligibility principle and the 'under the radar' strategy are still reasonable guides. If proficiency is low, flexibility is correspondingly reduced, and coping strategies become necessary. One source of inspiration in these situations is Gee's notion of 'mushfake Discourse', or 'partial acquisition coupled with meta-knowledge and strategies to "make do"' (Gee 2012: 178). A suggested metalinguistic strategy for writing consists of 'always having a memo edited to ensure no plural, possessive and third-person "s" agreement errors' (Gee 2012: 178). Applied to pronunciation, this kind of strategy might involve getting students to avoid the accent features that are most often noticed by examiners, interviewers and other gatekeepers: salient, intelligibility-reducing features such as consonantal substitutions and deletions, noticeable cluster simplifications and so on. As proficiency levels increase, the 'salience' of these features can often be established through classroom activities – the features that have negative consequences in accent samples or classroom discourse are probably those that the learners themselves should focus on.

The approach to teaching and learning being outlined here suggests that appropriate training for teachers is important, one that goes beyond an 'error eradication' approach. A central goal of training should also be to instil confidence, partly by exploring the variable nature of the 'local accent' from a features-based perspective. This of course applies to other accents, which tend to be seen as more homogeneous or standardized than they actually are. However, while a focus on intelligibility (rather than perfection) may be useful in increasing confidence, it should not be allowed to lapse into false promises of easy attainment. It is necessary to emphasize that all are affected by the demands of intelligibility, including native speakers. Training for local native-speaker teachers (such as the Native English-speaking Teachers or NETs in Hong Kong) may also be necessary, covering both their own accents and those of local students. Among the general indications of intelligibility research are that rapid speech and consonantal elisions are likely to reduce intelligibility for all speakers, and an appropriate flexibility is required of teachers. As NET teachers seem to be one of the main sources of conversational interaction in many schools, they can also learn from a features-based, intelligibility-oriented approach to pronunciation teaching. By making both NETs and local teachers aware of their strengths and weaknesses, the false dichotomy of native/non-native – one of the most pernicious ideological strongholds of 'accent hierarchization' – is further weakened.

Learning activities

What kinds of specific learning activities are indicated by the orientations noted above – towards intelligibility and literate English, repertoire expansion and adaptability, and the provision of appropriate meta-knowledge?

First, learners need the linguistic meta-knowledge supplied by the explicit study of pronunciation. They need the ability to notice features and differences, and the terminology to classify and talk about them. Gee (2012) notes that such 'analytical' approaches to language tend to be looked down upon from 'liberal' viewpoints, but argues that meta-knowledge represents 'power and liberation' (p. 175). Good language instruction should create 'meta-knowledge about sound, print and language as patterned systems' (Gee 2012: 175). The linguistic dimension of meta-knowledge includes knowledge of articulatory processes; this represents bringing 'unconscious' operations to conscious awareness. There are multiple and potentially lifelong uses of such a 'language toolkit'. In the classroom, for example, independent learning and self-evaluation are enabled. This has the benefit of avoiding the conflicts and difficulties of the assessor/assessed relationship, which can be especially problematic in the arena of pronunciation. Recordings of self and others, accompanied by commentaries on areas such as purpose and audience, can form part of meaningful portfolios for language assessment at higher levels.

However, if this type of meta-knowledge implies a focus on easily classifiable features and phonemic contrasts, the approach needs to be tempered with an awareness that this is insufficient. As Cook (2008: 80–1) points out, learning pronunciation is not just a question of learning the L2 phonemes; it also means learning rules at more general and more specific levels, for example those relating to syllable structure and the articulatory gestures involved in particular sounds. Cantonese learners' tendency to shorten or monophthongize diphthongs in words like *fake* – a common pronunciation might be [fɛk] – cannot only be addressed by focusing on vowel sounds. The shortening is a result of other factors, among them the L1-related tendency not to release the final consonant (if this is applied to the /k/ of *fake*, the tongue remains in contact with the velum instead of being lowered with a barely audible release). This follow-through gesture may seem insignificant, but it can affect the pronunciation of the entire word in terms of its overall duration and vowel quality. A features-based approach to pronunciation teaching needs to focus on syllables, words and longer syntactic units, as well as identifiable sounds and phonemes.

Gee's observation about 'sound, print and language' supports the arguments made above for 'literate English' and suggests that activities should relate pronunciation to other aspects of language, such as spelling. English sound–spelling relationships are often seen as unpredictable or somewhat perverse, but there are some patterns that can be taught, along the lines of the 'magic e' of phonics teaching (the letter that turns a *cap* into a *cape*, and usually indicates the presence of a diphthong). Spelling can also be used to draw students' attention to problematic simplification, as in the *pain*/*paint* example; awareness of silent letters (such as the 'k' of *knee*) leads to an awareness of non-silent ones (such

as the 'r' of *crowd*). Another way of exploring sound–spelling relationships is through dictation exercises, which create a natural focus on intelligibility. Students can listen to accent samples (or to each other) and write down what they hear; the reasons for discrepancies can then be discussed, acknowledging the role of both speaker and listener factors in intelligibility, along the lines taken in Chapter 7.

Another, more general way to relate pronunciation to other aspects of language is through what Kress (1976) calls 'continuity of description' (in Morgan 1997: 432). This involves explaining the smallest linguistic units (such as phonemes, or intonational features) in relation to larger contextual units, 'to reflect the specific function that language is intended to serve in a given situation' (Morgan 1997: 432). Analysis of speeches and other genres found on the internet can easily reveal that speakers articulate key words more carefully, emphasizing them through pausing, voice pitch or the avoidance of connected speech processes such as linking (these tend to blur word boundaries). The sense emerges that words do not have just one pronunciation, but several, according to the context. This once again involves consideration of specific purposes, genres and audiences: what may be intelligible for a high-proficiency audience may not be for a low-proficiency one, and audiences differ along many other dimensions (knowledge of the local context, subject knowledge and so on). Exercises that require students to transform texts from one genre to another, or to redesign them from the perspective of different audiences, are especially valuable in creating the kind of flexibility needed for global English. These exercises can also develop the kind of metalinguistic awareness referred to above, by alerting students to the likely requirements of different interlocutors and audiences.

From this 'repertoire' standpoint, and as noted in Chapter 5, the discussion of 'which model' becomes less relevant where global English is concerned. Again, being able to cope with variation is the goal of instruction. While there is a case for 'modelling', especially in the early stages of learning, no one model can provide the necessary exposure to accent variation. A wide range of other materials and activities is needed. Recordings of different kinds – audio and video, conversations, speeches, films and songs, native and non-native, local and non-local – can all be exploited, and all provide models in the wider sense of 'input'. In this sense of the term, each new voice and accent that students encounter is a model, an orientational exercise that develops listening and interpretation skills and gives students something to relate to, whether positively or negatively. We have seen that it is in the very nature of accent and pronunciation to provoke reactions, and the rich indexicalities provided by variation are something that can be profitably explored in classroom settings.

Finally, apart from being a fruitful site for developing meta-knowledge of various kinds, pronunciation teaching also emphasizes the somatic or embodied aspects of language. One of the strongest arguments for including it in the language curriculum is that it complements more 'cognitive' work on grammar and vocabulary. In time, pronunciation teaching may come to be aligned with emerging approaches that stress the embodied nature and affective dimensions of language learning (e.g. Kramsch 2009). The performative aspect of pronunciation is also

important, and there is little point working on knowledge about pronunciation if students fail to pronounce sounds clearly, or suffer from more general problems of audibility. Connecting pronunciation with activities such as voice training and singing brings a welcome physical, performative dimension into language learning. Given the important role of consonants in maintaining intelligibility, and the tendency for many L2 learners to 'drop' them (Dauer 2005: 548), it may even be worth reviving the term 'enunciation' to cover this aspect of pronunciation.

Conclusions

I began this book by outlining its aims under three headings: theoretical, polemical and practical. I shall conclude by outlining the main points it has made in these areas. The theoretical aspect of the book began with a broad consideration of global English, and of the sociolinguistics of globalization. The main indications that were carried forward included the stratification of social and linguistic space under conditions of globalization. The revised conceptual toolkit for global English captures aspects of this heterogeneity, and has the additional effect of blurring the boundaries that used to conveniently separate traditionally-defined languages, varieties and communities. The consequences for identity were captured by concepts such as polycentricity (Blommaert 2010), representing the multiple 'centres' towards which we orient ourselves, and Maher's (2005, 2010) metroethnicity, or the decoupling of ethnicity and culture. By inserting 'accent' and 'pronunciation' into this milieu, further aspects of their importance for identity emerged, including the importance of accent features in signalling identity positions.

The need to focus on features was further emphasized by considering their role in communication, with particular reference to the concept of intelligibility. This enabled the discussion to revisit the 'systematic/emergent' continuum of language use; this was identified in Chapter 2 as a major challenge for language pedagogy. As a complement to the 'emergent' orientation of some recent work on global English, and to a focus on 'acts of identity', the importance of the 'systematic' aspects of communication was also noted: there are 'acts of intelligibility' that tend to rely on regularly occurring features and contrasts. These can be used to inform pedagogical decision-making, while acknowledging the emergent, unpredictable aspects of global English communication.

The investigation of intelligibility in Chapter 4 also served the polemical aims of the book: it was argued in Chapter 5 that the concept of 'intelligibility' has been used to lend legitimacy to proposals for alternative models in pronunciation teaching. This tends to be part and parcel of the construction of 'varieties', however: strategically useful in the battle for legitimacy, but ontologically unstable in the light of current sociolinguistic approaches. I therefore argued that the concept of models, whether based on nation-state 'varieties' or transnational lingua franca patterns, is not only based on outdated concepts, but is strategically ineffective in the campaign to make language, and pronunciation, teaching more relevant to learners' needs. The four-quadrant model of accent variation,

presented in Chapter 5, represented an initial attempt to depict a features-based, post-variety approach to the theorization of accent variation and its pedagogical relevance. The model acknowledged the relevance of 'linguistic' factors, such as intelligibility, and more 'sociolinguistic' factors such as identity.

It also pointed to the kind of pedagogical orientation that was emerging in the book. As a prelude to this I first sketched the language-ideological landscape of Hong Kong, identifying particular ideologies of language with the aim of trying to secure acceptance for pedagogical proposals made within this landscape. The limitations of variety-based approaches were further illustrated through a detailed examination of 'Hong Kong English' in accent-related research. The data in Chapter 7 then provided further information about accent variation in the local context, and started to provide a more detailed basis for the emerging pedagogical approach. The student interviews added perspective to the data on intelligibility and acceptability, and drew attention to some of the emerging themes (such as variation in Hong Kong English accents, the question of intranational intelligibility, and the possible differences between accent and pronunciation).

So, in answer to the central question of what it may mean to teach English pronunciation in a globalized world, a few initial responses have been made. The keywords include adaptability, flexibility and repertoires, along with both knowledge and meta-knowledge. There is a focus on intelligibility within a features-based approach. This can be seen as *reinterpreting* 'nativeness', rather than exaggerating 'native/non-native' differences and trying to call a reified alternative into existence. The overall approach to pronunciation also acknowledges the relevance of written language and 'literate English' in responding to the complexities of global communication. Another strand of the approach is provided by meta-knowledge of two kinds: linguistic meta-knowledge involves explicit knowledge of pronunciation and accent features, tailored to local circumstances but once again with an emphasis on repertoire expansion and on participation in global communication and discourse. The provision of sociolinguistic meta-knowledge is intended to make students aware of the possibilities and constraints for the expression of identities, and to help them appreciate the sociohistorical milieu of global English.

I mentioned earlier that the approach taken here may be seen by some as too conservative – maintaining aspects of 'system', and acknowledging relatively few departures from so-called 'traditional' models – and by others as too radical, for emphasizing a 'strategic' awareness of variation that inevitably has ideological and political dimensions. But engaging with global English – whether as a teacher, student, researcher or policy-maker – is precisely this, engaging with its 'worldliness', in Pennycook's (2010a) sense of the word. There is worldliness in both the conservative and radical aspects. Going beyond the easy targets of the 'native speaker' and the 'standard', and taking a critical attitude towards the idea of 'attainable' local or lingua franca models – this is an aspect of worldliness, one that involves 'raising many questions about the grand narratives or sweeping epistemologies that underpin many discussions of World Englishes, linguistic imperialism or English as a lingua franca' (Pennycook 2010a: 81). There is also

worldliness in the orientation towards repertoire expansion and semiodiversity, or the proliferation of meanings. Going beyond simplistic local/global dualisms, there is a recognition that while 'everything is local' this does not mean retreating into narratives of traditional cultural practices, of resistance, or even of straightforward appropriation (Pennycook 2007).

But if everything is also global, in one way or another, this can only be understood from a local and yet multi-perspectival viewpoint, one that involves 'local, situated, contextual and contingent ways of understanding languages and language policies' (Pennycook 2010b: 121). Through its exploration of Hong Kong English accents, accents that are shaped by both local and global currents, this book has attempted to adopt such as viewpoint. In doing so it has tried to formulate an approach to pronunciation teaching that acknowledges the local and the global, the linguistic and the sociolinguistic, responding to Hasan's (1999: 75) call for a language education that is more than 'lessons in elocution'.

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