

# Thinking about teaching pronunciation

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# Points to consider

- Model
- Consonants
- Vowels
- Stress
- Rhythm
- Intonation
- Voice quality

# Model

- British? American? New Zealand?
- What do YOU model?
- Why you can't avoid the issue
  - You can't have a non-model in front of students
  - “No right answer” encourages drift
- Why it doesn't matter and why it does

# Consonants

- Individual consonants don't matter much, but some are more important than others
- Patterns of consonants may:
  - p/b, t/d, k/g
- Pick your battles

# Vowels

- Speakers used to great variation in vowel qualities
- Speakers accept lack of some distinctions (Singapore *then/than*, *cut/cart*; New Zealand *here/hair*; Yorkshire *cud/could*)
- But distinctions across systems are harder: *fit/feet*, *cot/caught/coat*, *bet/bait*
- Gross mergers may be impossible

# Stress

- Wrong stress can make words incomprehensible
- Some wrong stress will not be noticed
- Think of stress as related to vowel quality in the first instance
- Remember not all languages have schwa

# Rhythm

- Stress-timed rhythm will make things sound more inner-circle
- Syllable-timed English will almost always be comprehensible

# Intonation

- Intonation only important when a certain level of fluency is achieved
- The worst intonational errors come from people who speak really well
- Textbooks tend to introduce a very formal style of read English – not necessarily normal on the street



# Voice quality

- Italians always sound excited; Chinese speakers always sound angry
- Some voice qualities have negative emotions associated with them – which may vary from place to place
- Avoid excesses

# How do I know what to concentrate on?

- It depends on the individual
- Need to evaluate the most important points for each learner
- Remember that teachers in a particular community are captured by that community, which makes them bad judges of what is the priorities are

# So overall?

- Don't ignore pronunciation
- Good pronunciation leads to good acceptance
- But pronunciation is not everything
- The best pronunciation in the world is no use if you have nothing to say
- So weight the needs of the students

Thank you for your attention