

## Do we need a paradigm shift?

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*When displaying, using and analysing of IPA chart for teaching 'mutually intelligible pronunciation', is categorically denied as 'a waste of time and effort' on the basis that it will complicate matters for the adult learners, what else can we think of? Nothing, but 'Do we need a paradigm shift?'*

*An individual may feel threatened when confronted by the seasoned experts/leaders but a collective voice may be heard. Through this presentation I plan to highlight how IPA can be helpful in teaching 'pronunciation for mutual intelligibility' in ALBE, in relation to productive as well as receptive communication and urge you to reflect on your own practice so that you can decide for yourself on 'Do we need a paradigm shift?'*

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Adult learners bring-along local and/or overseas life experiences in an Australian classroom, added with multilingual/multicultural perspectives. As ESL/ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) learners, they need to build-in independent learning strategies when they progress step by step and build up confidence in articulating their thoughts, emotions, opinions and so

forth, with clear and mutually intelligible pronunciations in English.

When we delve deep into current research we can form our own opinion about how bilingual/multilingual mutual understanding can be developed and enhanced with the inclusion of IPA.

### 1 Current research

On 30 November 2004 the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP, Minister for Education, Science and Training, established a National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy.

The executive summary states, "The evidence is clear ... that direct systematic instruction in phonics during the early years of schooling is an essential foundation for teaching children to read. Findings from the research evidence indicate that all students learn best when teachers adopt an integrated approach to reading that explicitly teaches phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension."

It goes on to say "It was clear, that systematic phonics instruction is

critical if children are to be taught to read well, whether or not they experience reading difficulty." [2]

Adult learners are no exception to the above. "As English becomes an international language, the emphasis of pronunciation teaching will probably move away from trying to make learners sound like native speakers and towards helping them to become more intelligible in speaking with both, native and non-native speakers of English".[1]

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Hence, the supporters of **phonics approach** stress the need for explicit, direct instruction in the sound-letter relationship so that learners can learn to be literate.

The **whole language approach** on the other hand stresses the importance of working with real texts, and encourages students to come to their own understanding of the rules of language.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research highlights the fact that non native speakers outnumber native speakers of English, globally as well as within Australia. In a multilingual, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) or ESL class of adult learners, 'mutual intelligibility' is crucial as Jenkins (2000) rightly points out. So, phonics instruction, right up to phoneme level, is crucial for adult learners' LL development.

When approached for informal discussion, majority of my ALBE learners mentioned pronunciation as the main problem. They found it difficult to understand native speakers' or monolinguals' English, including the Australian variety. Hence, many VET providers now tend to have team teaching approach, where these learners are exposed to native as well as non-native speaker teachers/trainers. This proves to be a well thought-out strategy.

For an intercultural communication within a classroom, many of my colleagues tend to depend on traditional method of teaching pronunciation which is intuitive-imitative learning, in other words listen and repeat. It is based on

the theory of isolating sounds, syllable stress followed by sentence stress and intonation. This approach basically depends on auditory learning through discrete teaching which may be helpful and appropriate with the very beginners in adult sector.

However, there is an alternative approach of analyse and understand. Communicative language teaching in this case puts emphasis on analysing and understanding language usage which is helpful in ACSF 2 and 3 classes. For language analysis, IPA 'awareness' is vitally important

because phonetics and particularly phonology, lies at the heart of language teaching.

### **1.1 Experience as a teacher/trainer**

Current ESL/EFL teaching methodology focuses mainly on overcoming language barriers, be it in TL embedded context or TL removed context. Adults' first language acquisition is culture specific to begin with, but as they come in contact with the other language and other culture, they learn to figure out differences and/or similarities of those languages and develop better understanding of both the languages. In this Global Village, technology has provided various avenues to update bilingual knowledge face to face or on line. However, majority of the LL students still depend on paper dictionaries. They are not familiar with the computers or cannot afford electronic bilingual dictionaries. So, the more opportunities they get to immerse themselves in the multilingual/multicultural usage of English language, the better it is.

Phonetics and particularly phonology, lies at the heart of language teaching.

As a TESOL teacher I provide access to the maximum possible avenues for my students' Individual Training Plan for language development. It includes developing various learning strategies so they could enjoy success every step of the way in their learning: right from phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics etc, from word to discourse level. To put it figuratively, I believe in teaching about how to reach to a source of water and then, how to drink to quench one's thirst and enjoy, than providing water, when required, as required.

As a trilingual translator/interpreter and mainstream English as well as TESOL teacher/trainer, I think our main aim in ELF/ESL adult class should be to empower our learners with learning strategies so that they can eventually become independent learners. When our learners have mastered basics of the alphabets of English language at ACSF beginner level 1 and are enrolled in ACSF level 2/3 class, it is time to display and use IPA chart in the daily communicative lesson plans. I personally tried and tested the use of IPA chart, sometimes implicitly, other times explicitly or with integrated approach and the benefits have been overwhelming.

We cannot teach literacy in isolation. We blend-in oral/aural skills too, because our learners are Language and Literacy students. English is a complicated language to teach or to learn: especially when the learners are confronted with varieties of English around them in Australia and have no clear cut understanding of expectations for 'mutually intelligible pronunciation'.

Majority of teachers/trainers are familiar with the computer technology and tend to have access to a projector, internet and audio/video resources in a

classroom. To raise awareness of sounds, we can use IPA chart online for illustration too so that the learners are better able to distinguish between various sounds and can become independent learners by learning to read the symbols used in the paper dictionaries to guide pronunciation. This, in turn, would help them in reading aloud for assessment tasks too and eventually pick up strategies for the correct spelling.

We need to help them learn about and use of phonemes. Meta- linguistic communication would need a good deal of trial and error and an open mind. Every teacher need not be a linguistics expert for this. You can build and pass the 'awareness' of IPA symbols with half an hour routine every lesson.

Using audio visual aids to help them understand and clarify the intended meaning is also beneficial.

I ask my students to make a list at the end of their notebooks or in a separate notebook, as they develop new vocabulary: not only with the phonemic transcription but also with pronunciation in L1, wherever possible. Whenever learners work in pairs or groups with peers from L1, I allow and encourage them to go back to their L1s for comparative transcription. Testing them often, for example after introducing and practicing 5 phonemes, gives me clear indication about progress and about improving self esteem of the students.

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I follow Cambridge ESOL discussion group via my LinkedIn profile. Around Easter time this year, I initiated the following topic for discussion and I share the following responses with you:

## **At what stage should we introduce IPA to adult ESL/EFL learners?**

Many of my students/friends and scholars around me find it difficult to articulate sounds associated with pronunciation in various parts of the English speaking world. They have had very little understanding of proper pronunciations and how to read between the pronunciation guides provided in a dictionary. Just the other day, an academic from the field of science pronounced 'gesture' with 'g' sound instead of 'j' sound. When I tried to correct her in a friendly manner, she was offended. It's good to share these ideas with the like-minded professionals.

[Henrique M.](#) • Students should be introduced to IPA since they are beginners, methinks.

[Tony W.](#) • Perhaps slowly and surely-isolating and focusing on those sounds they have difficulty with. French students will have a different set from Mandarin /Chinese speakers etc. Adrian Underhill's Sound Foundations might be worth consulting for the 'how'. Try this series for a starter

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5R ekixAMoM>

also perhaps worrying too much about this might not be the best way to go. Suprasegmental elements of pronunciation are probably at least as important as this. Good luck!

[Ryan H.](#) • I'm very sceptical of the benefits of teaching IPA to students, though I could possibly see some arguments if they are of a relatively high level. Are there any studies on teaching IPA to language learners?

[Mike P.](#) • highly recommendable but no need to go overboard. Simple minimal pair games and sound recognition

activities can be introduced at an early age as long as the learner enjoys the activity!

[Lini K.](#) • Like to thank every one of you for a valuable input.

Tony, Adrian Underhill's series is a wonderful resource. Special thanks for sharing with us.

Mike: pragmatically sound advice in relation to children's language development. My prompt relates to teaching adults but I guess your idea can be applied in adult setting as well (I like 'as long as the learner enjoys the activity' bit as well). What do others think?

Ryan: I will post some resources for your query in a day or two because I am away from home, at the moment. Keep contributing...

[Lini K.](#) • Hi Ryan and others interested, I'm back on deck after Easter holidays. Try the following link and look at the references as well:  
<http://www.esljournal.org/62926768.html>

[Adrian I.](#) • I agree with Mike. Make it fun and engaging. I think it doesn't harm to start early on the IPA (at least to get learners on the right pronunciation path, even if they don't get to grips with the phonetic script), but only if it supported with the appropriate level of vocab and fully supplemented with audio features. We have a very popular free Phonetics Focus zone on our site:

<http://bit.ly/IXQ9mN> and we get lots of emails from people saying how much their kids enjoy it. They rarely mention the fact that it teaches IPA/Phonetics and just refer to the exciting way the games teach pronunciation.

IPA/Phonetics can be a very dry subject, so unless there's an enjoyable way to teach it, I'd perhaps save it for

once they've mastered the vagaries of English spelling rules before confusing them with the IPA. Once they have raised their spelling level though, it's a great self-study tool for dictionary use. Although, with so many online/mobile dictionaries nowadays with full audio support, I wonder how long the phonetic transcriptions will remain as important.

[Ryan H.](#) • Thanks for the link, Lini.

[Lini K.](#) • my pleasure Ryan. And, thanks Adrian. The web site is no doubt a valuable resource. It would certainly be enticing for the kids. I guess it can be helpful in the adult sector as well.

[Adrian I.](#) • I think the kids (or their teachers/parents perhaps) get drawn in by the interactivity/UX, and the games make it quite sticky, but judging by the 60+ Face book Likes/Comments that it has had, there appear to be lots of adults using it too. That part of our site alone gets over 300,000 visitors a year, with users spending anything up to 10 minutes on certain pron'/phon' activities in there.

[Lini K.](#) • Good to get this additional information Adrian. Thanks heaps!

[Matt L.](#) • Adrian Underhill suggests that it should be taught in one of the first lessons. I do icebreakers with classes in the first lesson but the phonemic chart in the second lesson. It is an essential tool to ensure accurate (ish) pronunciation from the outset.

[Mike P.](#) • With adult students, you can use a step by step approach. When problems arise, identify the sound from the IPA and write the word phonetically. Next, do some minimal pair activity to contrast sound differences and provide listening practice with various words

representing the contrasts. It probably takes up no more than a couple of minutes of class time at the most and you do not need to focus on more than, say, three contrasts per class. The benefit to the students is that they not only begin to understand the relationship between stress/intonation and meaning, but also actually learn to interpret the IPA in a pretty painless way!

[Christine Karen S.](#) • Best sense I've heard so far, thanks for that.

[Mike P.](#) • Thank you Christine....just as long as it helps people not feel the need to give entire lessons based on stress, intonation and pronunciation!

[Lini K.](#) • Thanks a lot Mike. I tried your ideas in class & it worked! I had sad/said, bad /bed, mad/made, bye/by/buy, there/their, foot/fruit, etc for practice.

[Patricia B.](#) • I totally agree with Mark.....  
Like this kind of relationship and reading the different comments. I'm also grateful.

[Jason O.](#) • Great advice from Mike, minimal pairs should be a priority.  
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## 1.2 Experience as a learner

I was fortunate enough to have trilingual teachers as English teachers, who could check our notes in every language. At home, my dad used to go through the list with me and give me more examples of the usage. I will give you the following as an example:

English word= Gesture ['dʒesʃər]

Meaning: Body movements to communicate

Pronunciation in Hindi/Marathi: ज्येस्च्यर

Meaning in Hindi/Marathi- (हावभाव)



Usage- We use gestures to communicate our feelings.

By the end of the year, we used to have an extensive list of words. This habit continued right up to post graduate years. To my pleasant surprise, IB Diploma /English B international students, especially the Chinese students in my class, used to adopt the same technique.

## 2 Teaching strategies:

Display and introduce ELF learners with the IPA chart: (If possible, give a copy of the chart for an individual learner in a class, right at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> round of 200 hrs and encourage them to buy a pronunciation dictionary. (e.g. Daniel Jones' 15<sup>th</sup> edition published by Cambridge, for \$20 from Bookery)

By the time students are enrolled in ACSF 2 class, they would have grasped that there are 26 letters in English alphabets: 5 vowels, a,e,i,o,u, and the rest are consonants, but 'y' at times works as a vowel too.

Next step can be, to add the following: There are 8 vowels, 12 diphthongs (two vowels as one syllable) and 24 consonants which are called phonemes, as listed on the chart.

Introduce a phoneme a day and test regularly. (Please observe if they are enjoying this or not, and change this approach if needed)

### A learner centred approach:

For example: While talking about visiting a doctor as a topic of the day, you may observe your learners having difficulty with pronouncing a word like 'appointment'. So, start with the first vowel 'a' written with 'ə' phoneme, followed by 'ɔɪ'.

Give them words like: abuse, assault, avoid, up, under and so forth with transcriptions and put them in the context of the topic. Then ask them to add a few more, working in pairs. (My students came up with: above, aloud, allow etc)

You may add new words to their vocabulary with transcriptions: e.g. arise, aroma, astonish and then explain some compound words like upset, upstairs, understand, uptight, underweight, etc.

Try similar approach with the next sound 'ɔɪ': ointment, point, joint, etc

Eventually, when they grasp these phonemes, give them phrases like: to make an appointment, to request for an appointment, consult the doctor for, ask for an advice etc.(Encourage learners to write these sounds in their L1 against each one, but some sounds may not exist in some L1s)

Follow up with the discussion on how 'ee, ea, and ie or ei' combinations give us a variety of spelling for the same sound. Cover a phoneme a day from the context of the daily topic and eventually learners would get used to this routine and become 'aware' of the use of phonemes.

Add suprasegmental features of English, after students become familiar with the 44 phonemes.

Demonstrate features of connected speech in a sentence: covering stress, intonation and rhythm. Give them short and simple sentences to transcribe or provide a transcription of a simple sentence and let the learners work in pairs, for a problem solving exercise: I try to improve my English or I owned a shop in my country.

By the time your learners are enrolled in the 4<sup>th</sup> round of 200 hrs each, work on compound sentences: I try to improve my English because I can't explain what's wrong with me to the doctor.

Give them a handout of an intended text and ask them to read for themselves individually. Then ask them to mark unfamiliar words that are difficult to pronounce and work on the similar lines as explained above, with transcription. Explain the meaning in the context and then ask them to read aloud to the class, turn by turn, and observe if they still need help with some of the words.

Respond to problems and issues as they come up. It involves teachers building up a rapport with learners and an ongoing relationship. This way consistent use of terms, and frameworks can be built up which allow good meta-linguistic communication.

Listen, compare and understand each other's pronunciation pattern. Encourage the learners to bring their own examples and questions to class for discussion.

To sum up, I believe that every English language teacher should be 'aware' of the use of IPA in adult LL sector. If not, they should up-skill in this direction for the benefit of their learners.

Please feel free to respond or comment to <[tribhashi.consultant@gmail.com](mailto:tribhashi.consultant@gmail.com)>

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### **Worthwhile online teaching resources:**

- ❖ <http://www.eslgalaxy.com/pronunciation.html> (with online games)

- ❖ <http://esl.about.com/library/lessons/blipaprint.htm> (For IPA Symbol card game)
- ❖ <http://www.esljournal.org/62926768.html>
- ❖ <http://bit.ly/IXQ9mN>
- ❖ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5RekixAMoM>
- ❖ [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_4549513\\_teach-pronunciation-esl-learners.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_4549513_teach-pronunciation-esl-learners.html)
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