The Lingua Franca Core

This document contains my response to the discussion questions presented in TESL 525 in week 6 regarding the Lingua Franc Core. The document seeks to provide my perspective on the issue of whether I believe the LFC should replace American and British Pronunciation.

1. What key proposals does Jenkins make with respect to teaching English pronunciation for international communication?

   Jenkins (2002) proposes a new revised phonological syllabus that seeks to redefine and re-classify pronunciation error. The proposal favors the rights of NNS to their own regional accents as opposed to viewing deviation from NS pronunciation norms as error.

   Jenkins (2002) proposes teaching the LFC for the following reasons. First and foremost, she points out that there are over 300 million nonnative English speakers who may regularly use English to communicate more with each other than with nonnative English speakers and as a result these NNS should be taught a more “scaled down” list of teachable and learnable pronunciation targets as opposed to the more common adopted classroom models, Received Pronunciation and General American (Dauer, 2005, p.544). Second, Jenkins (2002) argues that the majority of communication breakdowns were due to segmental errors rather than suprasegmentals. Jenkins (2002) states that these phonological and phonetic features “seem to be crucial as safeguards of mutual intelligibility in EIL and concentrating on these items is likely to be more effective than attending to every detail in which an NNS’s pronunciation differs from that of the pronunciation of an NS” (p.96). Finally, Jenkins (2002) argues that speakers of the LFC are not ‘foreign’ speakers of the language but ‘international’ speakers in which all participants have an equal claim to membership and can express their regional group
identity (p.85).

2. What do you consider noteworthy or surprising features of the Lingua Franca Core?

What I found most surprising in reading Jenkins article is the small amount of empirical research conducted in NNS-NNS speech contexts in terms of 1) what constitutes the best overall competence and 2) what learners need to be able to comprehend. I found this surprising because I agree with Jenkins (2002) in that “if we are to provide appropriate pedagogic proposals for EIL pronunciation, then these must be linked directly to relevant descriptions of NNS speech” (p.84). As Jenkins (2002) pointed out, there is only one spoken NNS-NNS corpus that she is aware of, Seidlhofer’s Vienna-Oxford ELF Corpus.

3. What aspects of the LFC are open to question?

One question that I ask in proposing to use the LFC in the classroom is, will it be beneficial for different student groups? I feel that the LFC may not meet some students’ needs while it may meet others in a mixed classroom of students who seek English for different purposes. For example, I used to prepare senior Samsung business executives in Korea for their assignment abroad. The majority of them would be required to interact daily with NS and as a result would benefit more from focusing on suprasegmentals than mainly segmentals. However, other executives were preparing to travel to non-English speaking countries where they would be interacting daily with NNS using English. For these students’ LFC would serve them well. I guess the question here is, How can you meet the needs of mixed classes such as the one described above in just using LFC or is it better to concentrate more on the common practices that are found in standard English to meet students who prepare to use both English with NS and NNS?

Dauer (2005) also questions Jenkins (2002) in asking why only nonnative – nonnative
interaction qualifies as “International English” since native – nonnative interaction also occurs frequently. Dauer (2005) also challenges Jenkins in noting “the LFC opens a debate on position targets and teaching priorities” (p.549). He feels that suprasegmentals have been given a shrift by Jenkins. However, Jenkins (2002) feels that eliminating target language sounds like the “th” at the beginning of words, allows learners to substitute sounds that they feel more comfortable with and states that the LFC will give “students accents which will enhance rather than damage their future social and economic prospects internationally” (p.542).

Another question I raise is do native speakers really want a LFC? Will they view this as an asset that will significantly help them or will they view it as a less important language given to them because they are not believed to be able to meet the same pronunciation standards as that of NS? Are the student’s goals going to be taken into account? I feel there is more research to be done in this area into the feeling and opinions of NNS regarding the incorporation of the LFC into the classroom and therefore more research must be conducted to address this issue so that others like myself are more apt to take a position. It is also important to note that some ESL learners don’t want to lose their accent. They are proud of where they come from, and they want their identity to be tied, at least in part, to their L1, even if it’s barely recognizable in their accent.

4. Finally, support your position on whether the LFC should replace American or British pronunciation as the basis of teaching English for international communication.

I don’t feel the LFC should replace American or British pronunciation as the basis of teaching English for international communication. I feel that there are a number of aspects that are highly beneficial about LFC, most notably the fact that NNS pronunciation of English is
viewed as a regional accent variation and as a result teachers, test makers and the public may therefore become more tolerant of all varieties of English. However, with that being said, I worry about the mutual unintelligibility. I agree with Trudgill (1998) as cited through Jenkins, “there is a great fear that English is now used so widely around the world, and is in particular used by so many non-native speakers, that if we are not careful, and very vigilant, the language will quite rapidly break up into a series of increasingly mutually unintelligible dialects, and eventually into different languages” (p.86).
