

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN WORLD ENGLISHES

English Pronunciation Models in a Globalized World

Accent, acceptability and Hong Kong
English

Andrew Sewell



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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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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.

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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’ (Sergeant 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’:

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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 mediated 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 hopscotching 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

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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,