IV-D. Study Circle on Teaching Listening, Speaking, and Pronunciation

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Study Circle on Teaching Listening, Speaking, and Pronunciation

Facilitator Guide

Introduction

The purpose of this study circle is to familiarize participants with the existing research on the processes of listening, speaking, and pronunciation acquisition, and to explore the pedagogical implications of this research in their own classrooms.

Readings

- *Improving Adult English Language Learners' Speaking Skills,* by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez. www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Speak.html
- *Improving ESL Learners' Listening Skills: At the Workplace and Beyond,* by Carol Van Duzer. www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/LISTENQA.html
- *Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills,* by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez. www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Pronun.html

Session Lengths

Session 1: 2 hours

Session 2: 2.5 hours

Session 3: 1.5 hours

Session 1

Facilitator Preparation for Session 1

1. Two weeks before the first session, send participants information about the study circle (location, times, etc.).
2. At that time, ask them to do the following within 1 week:
    - Write a short reaction/response to at least two of these statements:
        - The most effective way to teach languages is to combine all of the skills in every lesson rather than trying to teach them separately.
        - Strategy use in language learning can and should be taught explicitly.
        - For adult ESL learners, speaking and listening are the most important skills.
    - Email their reactions (no more than half a page in total) to you, the facilitator. You should then print these email responses *without names on them* and bring them to the first session.
3. After Step 2 has been completed, send one group of participants the CAELA digest on listening skills and the others the digest on speaking skills. Instruct them to read the digests before coming to the first session.
4. Remind participants to bring all participant handouts with them to each session.

1. Opening (5 minutes)

- Welcome the group and introduce yourself.
- Review the purpose of this study circle.
- Review logistical details such as the schedule, breaks, and the location of the bathrooms.
- Agree on the basic ground rules. (See How to Conduct a Study Circle in the "Information for Trainers" section.)

2. Participant introductions (5 minutes)

Format: Whole group

- Have participants briefly introduce themselves.

3. Inkshed exercise on listening and speaking skills (15–20 minutes)

Format: Individual and small groups

An inkshed is an opportunity for people to exchange ideas on a topic, through writing, in a short time. Responding to a prompt, participants write an initial reaction or idea on a piece of paper and place it in a central location in the room. They should not write their names on the paper. From the central location, they then take another person's paper, quickly read it, write a short response to it on the same piece of paper, and return it to the center table. They then take another paper, read the original reaction and subsequent response(s) on it, and add their comments, and so on. Encourage participants to read and respond to as many papers as they can. At the end of 5 to 10 minutes, all papers must be returned. Participants then find their own original response paper and look over the other participants' comments.

For this study circle inkshed, the facilitator should place on a central table the printed-out email responses that the facilitator received before the session (after first checking that no names are on the responses). Since the starting text has already been prepared, a 5- to 7-minute inkshed should allow enough time for each paper to have at least two or perhaps three comments added to it. After the writing part is finished, participants can read over the comments on their own original response paper. They then break into small groups (three or four people) and discuss the results. Participants might consider these thoughts:

- Did the initial responses of the participants tend to resemble or differ from one another?
- Were they surprised by any of the reactions to their initial thoughts?
- Since they have read one of the CAELA digests after writing their initial response paper, did anything in that reading confirm or change their original ideas?

4. Reviewing the theory on listening and speaking (20 minutes)

Format: Jigsaw activity in pairs

In this section, participants share with each other the contents of the readings on listening and speaking.

First, provide participants with the questions below and give them 2 to 3 minutes to quickly review on their own the CAELA piece that they read before coming to the session.

Then, instruct participants to pair up with someone who read the other piece, and, based on the questions, brief the other person on the information provided in the piece.

Note to facilitator: Key points to be raised are provided after the questions below.

Questions for the digest on speaking skills:

- What does it mean to say that speaking is an "interactive process of constructing meaning"?

  Key Points: *Speaking is not only about producing words and sentences; it is a process that involves receiving messages, processing them, and producing appropriate responses. The resulting content is dependent on the particular people involved, the context in which they are speaking, and the purpose of the communication.*

- What is an example of a language pattern that tends to recur in a particular situation or context—such as when declining an invitation, requesting time off work, or asking for help in a department store?

  Key Points: *When asking for help in a store (to take one example), the patterns may include*

  - *Question ("May I help you?")*
  - *Statement of need ("Yes, I'm looking for socks.")*
  - *Response to the statement of need ("They're in the women's clothing section, up one floor, turn right when you get off the escalator.")*
  - *Statement of appreciation ("Thanks.")*
  - *Acknowledgment of the appreciation ("You're welcome.")*

- According to the digest, in addition to familiarizing themselves with the language patterns of particular situations, learners need to be familiar with skills and strategies that "enhance comprehensibility." These include emphasizing key words, rephrasing, redirecting, providing feedback, or checking for listener comprehension. Using the language patterns from the previous question, what are some possible examples of these skills and strategies?

  Key Points: *An example of rephrasing is, "You said to go up to the second floor, right?" An example of checking for comprehension is, "Did you say you wanted socks?"*

- What is the difference between linguistic and sociolinguistic competence?

  Key Points: *Linguistic competence refers to the learners' ability to produce specific features of language such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Sociolinguistic competence refers to their ability to understand when, why, and in what ways to use the language.*

Questions for the digest on listening skills:

- The digest notes four factors affecting the listening process. Briefly review ways in which each one may affect listening comprehension.

  Key Points: *The four factors are*

  - *The listener's level of interest in the topic and ability to use negotiation skills (e.g., asking for clarification, repetition, or definition of points not understood*
  - *The speaker's use of colloquial language and reduced forms and the rate of delivery*
  - *The familiarity of the content to the listener*
  - *The existence and form of visual support*

- What are the basic processes involved in listening, and how do they interact with one another?

  Key Points: *The processes are*

  - *Determining a reason for listening*
  - *Depositing an image in short-term memory*
  - *Organizing information according to speech type*
  - *Predicting information in message*
  - *Recalling background information*
  - *Assigning meaning to message*
  - *Checking that the message has been understood*
  - *Choosing information to keep in long-term memory*
  - *Deleting message in short-term memory*

  These processes generally occur unconsciously. They may occur at the same time, in succession, and not necessarily in the order written above.

- What is the difference between top-down and bottom-up processing?

  Key Points*: Top-down processing uses background knowledge and broad understandings to derive the meaning of a text, while bottom-up processing derives meaning from the incoming language information (e.g., sounds, words, grammatical relationships, and intonation).*

5. Classroom practice reflections (50 minutes)

Format: Individual, small groups, and whole group

This activity encourages participants to think about their own classroom practices in relation to the information provided in the two digests. It comprises three basic steps—individual reflection, small-group discussion, and whole-group discussion—which should be completed first for listening and then for speaking. Broad, guiding questions are provided below for each step of the activity. Possible answers to questions raised are in italics.

Individual reflection, digest on listening skills (5 minutes)

Participants look at the section in the digest on listening tasks ("What kinds of listening tasks are appropriate?"). Have participants take out the handout on listening tasks entitled "Reflections on Listening Tasks" and fill it out while thinking about two questions:

- Which of the tasks have you used in your classroom and which have you not used?
- What are your reasons for using some and not others?

Small-group discussion, digest on listening skills (15 minutes)

In small groups, the participants compare and discuss their responses to the two questions above, considering the similarities and differences in their responses and the possible reasons for them. In their discussion of the reasons for these similarities and differences, participants may consider these two questions:

- Do you feel some tasks are more or less important/appropriate/challenging/appealing/easy than others? If so, which ones, and why?
- Do you feel that the level or the context of your class affects the use of these various tasks? If so, in what ways?

In their discussion, encourage participants to also think about how these various tasks can be used to address the broader-level suggestions offered in the listening digest section on selecting techniques and activities *(tasks should be relevant; material should be authentic; both top-down and bottom-up processing skills should be developed; listening strategies should be encouraged; activities should teach, not test*). For example, in what ways might a combination of tasks be used to help develop listening strategies, or to focus students on the process of listening or speaking rather than simply on memory, so that instruction might improve rather than merely test students' listening and speaking skills?

Whole-group discussion, digest on listening skills (15 minutes)

Invite each group to briefly share any thoughts or questions that arose in the small-group discussions.

Following the whole-group discussion, have participants go through the same three-step process for the digest on speaking skills, with just a few differences. For the individual reflection, have participants fill out the handout entitled "Reflections on Speaking Tasks." For the small-group discussion, have them consider the following additional questions: Can the broader-level considerations suggested in the listening digest also be relevant when selecting speaking techniques and activities? If so, in what ways might the various speaking tasks be used to address these broader-level considerations?

6. Considering application (20 minutes)

Format: Individual and pairs

Now that participants have had the chance to think about their own use of these tasks and to share some ideas about them, ask them to once again look over the tasks—both for listening and speaking—and reflect on which ones they might like to experiment with, either for the first time or simply in different ways, contexts, or combinations (5 minutes).

Next, have participants pair up and share what they chose and why with a partner. What do they hope will happen or change by using this task or this combination of tasks? After they have talked through their ideas with a partner, have them fill out the New Activity Planning Form. Encourage participants to consider peer observation in their plans if there are co-workers in the study circle. (See the Peer Observation Form and the Peer Coaching and Mentoring Guide.) Ask participants to complete the New Activity Notes for Listening and Speaking Tasks when they have tried the activity in their classroom. Point out that if participants would like to do additional reading between sessions for ideas on listening and speaking tasks, a list of suggested references is available in their handouts (15 minutes).

7. Evaluation (5 minutes)

Do a quick evaluation to identify the main strengths and weaknesses of the session. Ask participants two questions:

- What was the most useful aspect of today's session?
- What might we change if we do this study circle again?

8. Closing (2 minutes)

Remind participants of the next meeting and its time and place. Answer any last-minute questions. Ask participants to bring their completed New Activity Notes to the next session.

Session 2

Facilitator Preparation for Session 2

1. Bring to the session a selection of textbooks for teaching pronunciation. They can be made available to participants who want additional information or ideas during the exercise on Preparation for Interim Activity.
2. Bring copies of the reading *Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills*.

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Welcome the group back.

2. Debriefing the interim activities (30 minutes)

Format: Small groups

In small groups, participants use their New Activity Planning and Notes Forms for Listening and Speaking Tasks to discuss the activity they tried in their classes between the sessions. They focus on the following questions:

- What tasks did you teach? What happened? What factors affected your implementation?
- What did you conclude from implementing this activity or strategy?
- What advice would you have for other practitioners about using this task or combination of tasks?

A volunteer from each group presents to the whole group the main points from the small-group discussion, summarizing each group's basic assessment of how the tasks worked and the group members' advice for other practitioners. Problems that emerged or requests for ideas and advice can be the subject of discussion. Overall, participants discuss their impressions of using the various listening and speaking tasks in their classrooms.

3. Reflecting in writing (15 minutes)

Format: Individual

Now that participants have tried teaching a new task or combination of tasks, talked about it with colleagues, and heard about others' teaching experiences, they need to think about what to do next. Ask participants to write for 10 minutes about what they discovered through their experimentation, what they learned from the experiences of others, and what they see as their next steps. In terms of next steps, specific questions could include the following:

- Based on your experience and the experiences of others, will you try using the same task(s) again? Will you modify it? How?
- Will you try using other tasks?

Invite volunteers to read aloud what they have written.

4. Inkshed exercise on pronunciation skills (35 minutes)

Format: Individual and whole group

See Session 1 for a general description of an inkshed exercise.

For this inkshed activity, give participants 3 to 5 minutes to write a response to the following statement:

> Unlike children, adult second language learners will always retain an accent. Therefore, explicit pronunciation practice with them is an impractical use of class time.

After 5 to 7 minutes of responding to others' papers, give participants a minute to find and read over their own initial response. The participants then discuss as a whole group their thoughts about teaching pronunciation. The following are possible guiding questions:

- What are your general thoughts about teaching pronunciation explicitly to your adult English language learners?
- Did anyone have any changes of opinion after reading the comments and responses of their colleagues?
- What are your ideas about factors other than age that may or may not limit pronunciation learning? For example, what do you think about the idea that the aptitude for achieving native-like pronunciation differs among learners? Do you have examples of this from your personal or professional experience?
- What do you think about the idea that learner *attitude* and *motivation* can support or impede the development of pronunciation skills? Examples?
- What do you think about the idea that a learner's *native language* influences the pronunciation of the target language? Examples?

5. Reading (10 minutes)

Format: Individual

Give participants the third article *(Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills)* and ask them to read it.

6. Discussion (20 minutes)

Format: Small group and whole group

First in small groups (10 minutes) and then as a whole group (10 minutes), have the participants discuss the reading. Questions to be considered in the discussion may include the following:

- Did the reading confirm or change anyone's ideas about factors affecting pronunciation mastery?
- Did anyone's ideas about the importance of teaching pronunciation skills change?
- What level of emphasis do you feel should be placed on pronunciation with your learners, taking into consideration factors such as learners' own characteristics and institutional, linguistic, and methodological variables? (See the digest section on *Incorporating Pronunciation into the Curriculum*.)

7. Preparation for interim activity (35 minutes)

Format: Whole group, small group, and individual

For the interim activity, the participants will be asked to try incorporating some explicit pronunciation instruction in their classrooms—or if they are already doing so, to experiment with a different technique or approach. The following activity is intended to help them begin to think about what type of pronunciation teaching technique or approach they might try.

First, have the whole group discuss (5 minutes) the following questions:

- How have you tried incorporating pronunciation instruction in your classes?
- What methods have you tried using to teach pronunciation?

Next, break the participants into small groups to work through the following exercise. If possible, group participants with similar work contexts and student populations together. Pronunciation textbooks can be made available to participants at this time.

a. Based on their students' needs, participants decide on a pronunciation feature that they think would be useful to practice explicitly in their classroom. Examples can be drawn from the section in the digest on Language Features Involved in Pronunciation. They can include *segmentals* (particular sounds that the students have difficulties in distinguishing and producing in English) or *suprasegmentals* (e.g., stress, rhythm, adjustments in connected speech, prominence, and intonation).

b. Following the framework provided in the digest section on Incorporating Pronunciation in Instruction, have participants write on a flipchart a sample lesson to teach this pronunciation feature, including any suggested exercises or specific methods. Post the flipcharts (20 minutes for Steps a and b).

c. Have the participants walk around and look at the other groups' lesson plans. Provide time for them to ask questions, give suggestions, and take notes (5 minutes).

d. Hand out the New Activity Planning and Notes Forms for Pronunciation Instruction and explain that, as in the exercise they have just done, they will be choosing a pronunciation feature to focus on in their classrooms, designing appropriate lesson plans to highlight that feature, and teaching these lessons in their classrooms between this and the next study circle session. Give participants 5 minutes to begin thinking about what this pronunciation feature might be. They may work alone, talk to their colleagues, or use the posted flip sheets to come up with ideas. They may begin to fill out their New Activity Planning Form, but it does not need to be completed at this time. Both forms, however, should be completed and brought to the next study circle session.

e. Remind participants that they can look for sources on teaching pronunciation on the resource sheet in their handouts.

f. Ask whether anyone has any final questions about the intersession activity.

8. Evaluation (5 minutes)

Do a quick evaluation to identify the main strengths and weaknesses of the session. Ask participants

- What was the most useful aspect of today's session?
- What might we change if we do this study circle again?

9. Closing (2 minutes)

Remind participants of the next meeting and its time and place. Answer any last-minute questions. Ask participants to bring their completed New Activity Notes to the next session.

Session 3

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Welcome the group back, asking participants how their interim activity went.

2. Debriefing the interim activity (45 minutes)

Format: Small groups and whole group

After grouping participants with others who experimented with the same or with a similar pronunciation feature, ask them to refer to their New Activity Notes as they share their experiences. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:

- What did you try? What happened? What factors affected your implementation?
- What did you conclude from implementing this activity or strategy?
- What advice would you have for other practitioners about implementing this strategy?

Have a volunteer from each small group report to the whole group the main conclusions and discoveries from their small-group debriefing.

- What were the group members' general impressions about pronunciation instruction?
- What factors had the most impact (positive or negative) on their implementation?
- Were there any surprises?

Encourage discussion and comparison of results between groups.

3. Concluding inkshed (15 minutes)

Format: Individual and whole group

Have the participants write for 3 minutes in response to the following prompt:

> Through this study circle I have learned/changed my ideas about …

At the end of 3 minutes, they put their papers (without names) on the center table and, for the next 7 minutes, comment on other participants' papers. Then, they look over their own papers for a few minutes. Invite participants to share some of their thoughts about their own feelings or about the comments they received on their inksheds.

4. Planning next steps (10 minutes)

Format: Whole group

Ask whether any of the participants would like to pursue follow-up ideas from their interim session activities. Talk about what these might be. Examples might include making lesson plans available to colleagues or posting activity results on a state or regional professional development Web site. Invite participants to consider how they might continue to support each other as a group. Does the group want to meet again or stay in touch in other ways? If the group wants to continue to meet, make sure that there is a clear purpose and focus for the meetings.

5. Closing (5 minutes)

Draw participants' attention to other resources available on teaching listening, speaking, and pronunciation. (See reading list at the end of the Participant Handouts.)

Thank the group for their work.

6. Evaluation (5 minutes)

Ask the participants to fill out the Evaluation Form, requesting feedback about the entire study circle. If there is time, provide an opportunity for volunteers to comment on their experiences in the study circle.

Improving Adult English Language Learners' Speaking Skills

MaryAnn Cunningham Florez
National Center for ESL Literacy Education
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Communicative and whole language instructional approaches promote integration of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in ways that reflect natural language use. But opportunities for speaking and listening require structure and planning if they are to support language development. This digest describes what speaking involves and what good speakers do in the process of expressing themselves. It also presents an outline for creating an effective speaking lesson and for assessing learners' speaking skills.

Oral communication skills in adult ESL instruction

Outside the classroom, listening is used twice as often as speaking, which in turn is used twice as much as reading and writing (Rivers, 1981). Inside the classroom, speaking and listening are the most often used skills (Brown, 1994). They are recognized as critical for functioning in an English language context, both by teachers and by learners. These skills are also logical instructional starting points when learners have low literacy levels (in English or their native language) or limited formal education, or when they come from language backgrounds with a non-Roman script or a predominantly oral tradition. Further, with the drive to incorporate workforce readiness skills into adult ESL instruction, practice time is being devoted to such speaking skills as reporting, negotiating, clarifying, and problem solving (Grognet, 1997).

What speaking is

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing *and* receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Language functions (or patterns) that tend to recur in certain discourse situations (e.g., declining an invitation or requesting time off from work), can be identified and charted (Burns & Joyce, 1997). For example, when a salesperson asks "May I help you?" the expected discourse sequence includes a statement of need, response to the need, offer of appreciation, acknowledgement of the appreciation, and a leave-taking exchange. Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary *(linguistic competence)*, but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language *(sociolinguistic competence)*. Finally, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Cohen, 1996). A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

What a good speaker does

A speaker's skills and speech habits have an impact on the success of any exchange (Van Duzer, 1997). Speakers must be able to anticipate and then produce the expected patterns of specific discourse situations. They must also manage discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting (Burns & Joyce, 1997). For example, a learner involved in the exchange with the salesperson described previously must know the usual pattern that such an interaction follows and access that knowledge as the exchange progresses. The learner must also choose the correct vocabulary to describe the item sought, rephrase or emphasize words to clarify the description if the clerk does not understand, and use appropriate facial expressions to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service. Other skills and knowledge that instruction might address include the following:

- producing the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures, and intonations of the language;
- using grammar structures accurately;
- assessing characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations of participants, interest levels, or differences in perspectives;
- selecting vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate for the audience, the topic being discussed, and the setting in which the speech act occurs;
- applying strategies to enhance comprehensibility, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, or checking for listener comprehension;
- using gestures or body language; and
- paying attention to the success of the interaction and adjusting components of speech such as vocabulary, rate of speech, and complexity of grammar structures to maximize listener comprehension and involvement (Brown, 1994).

Teachers should monitor learners' speech production to determine what skills and knowledge they already have and what areas need development. Bailey and Savage's *New Ways in Teaching Speaking* (1994), and Lewis's *New Ways in Teaching Adults* (1997) offer suggestions for activities that can address different skills.

General outline of a speaking lesson

Speaking lessons can follow the usual pattern of preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and extension. The teacher can use the *preparation* step to establish a context for the speaking task (where, when, why, and with whom it will occur) and to initiate awareness of the speaking skill to be targeted (asking for clarification, stressing key words, using reduced forms of words). In *presentation*, the teacher can provide learners with a preproduction model that furthers learner

comprehension and helps them become more attentive observers of language use. *Practice* involves learners in reproducing the targeted structure, usually in a controlled or highly supported manner. *Evaluation* involves directing attention to the skill being examined and asking learners to monitor and assess their own progress. Finally, *extension* consists of activities that ask learners to use the strategy or skill in a different context or authentic communicative situation, or to integrate use of the new skill or strategy with previously acquired ones (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1995).

Example of a speaking lesson

Choosing appropriate topics for small talk

1. **Preparation.** Show the learners a picture of two people conversing in a familiar casual setting. (The setting will be determined by a prior needs assessment.) Ask them to brainstorm what the people might be discussing (i.e., what topics, vocabulary, typical phrases).
2. **Presentation.** Present several video clips of small talk in casual situations. Have learners complete a worksheet in which they describe or list the topics discussed, the context in which the speech is occurring, and any phrases that seem to typify small talk. Follow up with a discussion of the kinds of topics that are appropriate for small talk, the factors in the specific situations that affect topic selection (e.g., relationships of participants, physical setting), and typical phrases used in small talk. Chart this information.
3. **Practice.** Give learners specific information about the participants and the setting of a scenario where small talk will take place. In pairs, have them list topics that might be discussed by the participants and simple phrases they might use. Learners then engage in improvised dialogues based on these simple phrases.
4. **Evaluation.** Give pairs a teacher-prepared dialogue based on their scenario from š. Ask them to compare their improvised dialogues with the prepared dialogue, analyzing the similarities, differences, and reasons for both.
5. **Extension.** Have learners go individually or in small groups into various contexts in the community (work, school, church, bus stop) and record the conversations they hear. Ask them to report their findings back to the class, and then have the class discuss these findings.

In-class speaking tasks

Although dialogues and conversations are the most obvious and most often used speaking activities in language classrooms, a teacher can select activities from a variety of tasks. Brown (1994) lists six possible task categories:

1. **Imitative**—Drills in which the learner simply repeats a phrase or structure (e.g., "Excuse me." or "Can you help me?") for clarity and accuracy;
2. **Intensive**—Drills or repetitions focusing on specific phonological or grammatical points, such as minimal pairs or repetition of a series of imperative sentences;

3. **Responsive**—Short replies to teacher or learner questions or comments, such as a series of answers to yes/no questions;

4. **Transactional**—Dialogues conducted for the purpose of information exchange, such as information-gathering interviews, role plays, or debates;

5. **Interpersonal**—Dialogues to establish or maintain social relationships, such as personal interviews or casual conversation role plays; and

6. **Extensive—**Extended monologues such as short speeches, oral reports, or oral summaries.

These tasks are not sequential. Each can be used independently or they can be integrated with one another, depending on learners' needs. For example, if learners are not using appropriate sentence intonations when participating in a *transactional* activity that focuses on the skill of politely interrupting to make a point, the teacher might decide to follow up with a brief *imitative* lesson targeting this feature.

When presenting tasks, teachers should tell learners about the language function to be produced in the task and the real context(s) in which it usually occurs. They should provide opportunities for interactive practice and build upon previous instruction as necessary (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Teachers should also be careful not to overload a speaking lesson with other new material such as numerous vocabulary or grammatical structures. This can distract learners from the primary speaking goals of the lesson.

Assessing speaking

Speaking assessments can take many forms, from oral sections of standardized tests such as the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) or the English as a Second Language Oral Assessment (ESLOA) to authentic assessments such as progress checklists, analysis of taped speech samples, or anecdotal records of speech in classroom interactions. Assessment instruments should reflect instruction and be incorporated from the beginning stages of lesson planning (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). For example, if a lesson focuses on producing and recognizing signals for turn-taking in a group discussion, the assessment tool might be a checklist to be completed by the teacher or learners in the course of the learners' participation in the discussion. Finally, criteria should be clearly defined and understandable to both the teacher and the learners.

Conclusion

Speaking is key to communication. By considering what good speakers do, what speaking tasks can be used in class, and what specific needs learners report, teachers can help learners improve their speaking and overall oral competency.

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Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills

MaryAnn Cunningham Florez
National Center for ESL Literacy Education
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Observations that limited pronunciation skills can undermine learners' self-confidence, restrict social interactions, and negatively influence estimations of a speaker's credibility and abilities are not new (Morley, 1998). However, the current focus on communicative approaches to English as a second language (ESL) instruction and the concern for building teamwork and communication skills in an increasingly diverse workplace are renewing interest in the role that pronunciation plays in adults' overall communicative competence. As a result, pronunciation is emerging from its often marginalized place in adult ESL instruction. This digest reviews the current status of pronunciation instruction in adult ESL classes. It provides an overview of the factors that influence pronunciation mastery and suggests ways to plan and implement pronunciation instruction.

Historical Perspective

Pronunciation instruction tends to be linked to the instructional method being used (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). In the grammar-translation method of the past, pronunciation was almost irrelevant and therefore seldom taught. In the audio-lingual method, learners spent hours in the language lab listening to and repeating sounds and sound combinations. With the emergence of more holistic, communicative methods and approaches to ESL instruction, pronunciation is addressed within the context of real communication (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Morley, 1991).

Factors Influencing Pronunciation Mastery

Research has contributed some important data on factors that can influence the learning and teaching of pronunciation skills. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, (1996), Gillette (1994), Graham (1994) and Pennington (1994) discuss the following factors.

Age. The debate over the impact of age on language acquisition and specifically pronunciation is varied. Some researchers argue that, after puberty, lateralization (the assigning of linguistic functions to the different brain hemispheres) is completed, and adults' ability to distinguish and produce native-like sounds is more limited. Others refer to the existence of sensitive periods when various aspects of language acquisition occur, or to adults' need to re-adjust existing neural networks to accommodate new sounds. Most researchers, however, agree that adults find pronunciation more difficult than children do and that they probably will not achieve native-like pronunciation. Yet experiences with language learning and the ability to self-monitor, which come with age, can offset these limitations to some degree.

Amount and type of prior pronunciation instruction. Prior experiences with pronunciation instruction may influence learners' success with current efforts. Learners at higher language proficiency levels may have developed habitual, systematic pronunciation errors that must be identified and addressed.

Aptitude. Individual capacity for learning languages has been debated. Some researchers believe all learners have the same capacity to learn a second language because they have learned a first language. Others assert that the ability to recognize and internalize foreign sounds may be unequally developed in different learners.

Learner attitude and motivation. Nonlinguistic factors related to an individual's personality and learning goals can influence achievement in pronunciation. Attitude toward the target language, culture, and native speakers; degree of acculturation (including exposure to and use of the target language); personal identity issues; and motivation for learning can all support or impede pronunciation skills development.

Native language. Most researchers agree that the learner's first language influences the pronunciation of the target language and is a significant factor in accounting for foreign accents. So-called interference or negative transfer from the first language is likely to cause errors in aspiration, intonation, and rhythm in the target language.

The pronunciation of any one learner might be affected by a combination of these factors. The key is to be aware of their existence so that they may be considered in creating realistic and effective pronunciation goals and development plans for the learners. For example, native-like pronunciation is not likely to be a realistic goal for older learners; a learner who is a native speaker of a tonal language, such as Vietnamese, will need assistance with different pronunciation features than will a native Spanish speaker; and a twenty-three year old engineer who knows he will be more respected and possibly promoted if his pronunciation improves is likely to be responsive to direct pronunciation instruction.

Language Features Involved in Pronunciation

Two groups of features are involved in pronunciation: segmentals and suprasegmentals. *Segmentals* are the basic inventory of distinctive sounds and the way that they combine to form a spoken language. In the case of North American English, this inventory is comprised of 40 phonemes (15 vowels and 25 consonants), which are the basic sounds that serve to distinguish words from one another. Pronunciation instruction has often concentrated on the mastery of segmentals through discrimination and production of target sounds via drills consisting of minimal pairs like /bæd/-/bæt/ or /sIt/-/sît/.

Suprasegmentals transcend the level of individual sound production. They extend across segmentals and are often produced unconsciously by native speakers. Since suprasegmental elements provide crucial context and support (they determine meaning) for segmental production, they

are assuming a more prominent place in pronunciation instruction (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Gilbert, 1990; Morley, 1991). Suprasegmentals include the following:

- **stress**—a combination of length, loudness, and pitch applied to syllables in a word (e.g., Happy, FOOTball);
- **rhythm**—the regular, patterned beat of stressed and unstressed syllables and pauses (e.g., with weak syllables in lower case and stressed syllables in upper case: they WANT to GO Later.);
- **adjustments in connected speech**—modifications of sounds within and between words in streams of speech (e.g., "ask him," /æsk hIm/ becomes /æs kIm/);
- **prominence**—speaker's act of highlighting words to emphasize meaning or intent (e.g., Give me the BLUE one. (not the yellow one); and
- **intonation**—the rising and falling of voice pitch across phrases and sentences (e.g., Are you REAdy?).

Incorporating Pronunciation in the Curriculum

In general, programs should start by establishing long range oral communication goals and objectives that identify pronunciation needs as well as speech functions and the contexts in which they might occur (Morley, 1998). These goals and objectives should be realistic, aiming for functional intelligibility (ability to make oneself relatively easily understood), functional communicability (ability to meet the communication needs one faces), and enhanced self-confidence in use (Gillette, 1994; Jordan, 1992; Morley, 1998). They should result from a careful analysis and description of the learners' needs (Jordan, 1992; Morley, 1998). This analysis should then be used to support selection and sequencing of the pronunciation information and skills for each sub-group or proficiency level within the larger learner group (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996).

To determine the level of emphasis to be placed on pronunciation within the curriculum, programs need to consider certain variables specific to their contexts.

- **the learners** (ages, educational backgrounds, experiences with pronunciation instruction, motivations, general English proficiency levels)
- **the instructional setting** (academic, workplace, English for specific purposes, literacy, conversation, family literacy)
- **institutional variables** (teachers' instructional and educational experiences, focus of curriculum, availability of pronunciation materials, class size, availability of equipment)
- **linguistic variables** (learners' native languages, diversity or lack of diversity of native languages within the group)
- **methodological variables** (method or approach embraced by the program)

Incorporating Pronunciation in Instruction

Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996) propose a framework that supports a communicative-cognitive approach to teaching pronunciation. Preceded by a planning stage to identify learners' needs, pedagogical priorities, and teachers' readiness to teach pronunciation, the framework for the teaching stage of the framework offers a structure for creating effective pronunciation lessons and activities on the sound system and other features of North American English pronunciation.

- description and analysis of the pronunciation feature to be targeted (raises learner awareness of the specific feature)
- listening discrimination activities (learners listen for and practice recognizing the targeted feature)
- controlled practice and feedback (support learner production of the feature in a controlled context)
- guided practice and feedback (offer structured communication exercises in which learners can produce and monitor for the targeted feature)
- communicative practice and feedback (provides opportunities for the learner to focus on content but also get feedback on where specific pronunciation instruction is needed).

A lesson on word stress, based on this framework, might look like the following:

1. The teacher presents a list of vocabulary items from the current lesson, employing both correct and incorrect word stress. After discussing the words and eliciting (if appropriate) learners' opinions on which are the correct versions, the concept of word stress is introduced and modeled.
2. Learners listen for and identify stressed syllables, using sequences of nonsense syllables of varying lengths (e.g., da-DA, da-da-DA-da).
3. Learners go back to the list of vocabulary items from step one and, in unison, indicate the correct stress patterns of each word by clapping, emphasizing the stressed syllables with louder claps. New words can be added to the list for continued practice if necessary.
4. In pairs, learners take turns reading a scripted dialogue. As one learner speaks, the other marks the stress patterns on a printed copy. Learners provide one another with feedback on their production and discrimination.
5. Learners make oral presentations to the class on topics related to their current lesson. Included in the assessment criteria for the activity are correct production and evidence of self-monitoring of word stress.

In addition to careful planning, teachers must be responsive to learners needs and explore a variety of methods to help learners comprehend pronunciation features. Useful exercises include the following:

- Have learners touch their throats to feel vibration or no vibration in sound production, to understand voicing.
- Have learners use mirrors to see placement of tongue and lips or shape of the mouth.
- Have learners use kazoos to provide reinforcement of intonation patterns
- Have learners stretch rubber bands to illustrate lengths of vowels.
- Provide visual or auditory associations for a sound (a buzzing bee demonstrates the pronunciation of /z/).
- Ask learners to hold up fingers to indicate numbers of syllables in words.

Conclusion

Pronunciation can be one of the most difficult parts of a language for adult learners to master and one of the least favorite topics for teachers to address in the classroom. Nevertheless, with careful preparation and integration, pronunciation can play an important role in supporting learners' overall communicative power.

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Improving ESL Learners' Listening Skills: At the Workplace and Beyond

Carol Van Duzer
Center for Applied Linguistics
Project in Adult Immigrant Education (PAIE)
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Listening is a critical element in the competent language performance of adult second language learners, whether they are communicating at school, at work, or in the community. Through the normal course of a day, listening is used nearly twice as much as speaking and four to five times as much as reading and writing (Rivers, 1981). In a recent study of Fortune 500 Corporations, Wolvin and Coakley (1991) found that listening was perceived to be crucial for communication at work with regards to entry-level employment, job success, general career competence, managerial competency, and effectiveness of relationships between supervisors and subordinates. Yet listening remains one of the least understood processes in language learning despite the recognition of the critical role it plays both in communication and in language acquisition (Morley, 1991). As language teaching has moved toward comprehension-based approaches, listening to learn has become an important element in the adult English as a second language (ESL) classroom (Lund, 1990).

This Q&A summarizes what is known about the listening process as it relates to adult second language learners; it discusses the factors affecting listening; it describes the listening process; it suggests guidelines to consider in teaching listening; and it gives examples of activities for practicing and developing listening skills in adults learning English as a second language. Although most of the activities described have a workplace program context, the same types of activities could be used in any adult ESL class to improve learners' listening in all facets of life: at school, at work, or in the community.

What are some factors that affect the listening process?

Listening is a demanding process, not only because of the complexity of the process itself, but also due to factors that characterize the listener, the speaker, the content of the message, and any visual support that accompanies the message (Brown & Yule, 1983).

The Listener

Interest in a topic increases the listener's comprehension; the listener may tune out topics that are not of interest. A listener who is an active participant in a conversation generally has more background knowledge to facilitate understanding of the topic than a listener who is, in effect, eavesdropping on a conversation between two people whose communication has been recorded on an audiotape. Further, the ability to use negotiation skills, such as asking for clarification, repetition, or definition of points not understood, enable a listener to make sense of the incoming information.

The Speaker

Colloquial language and reduced forms make comprehension more difficult. The extent to which the speaker uses these language forms impacts comprehension. The more exposure the listener has to them, the greater the ability to comprehend. A speaker's rate of delivery may be too fast, too slow, or have too many hesitations for a listener to follow. Awareness of a speaker's corrections and use of rephrasing ("er. . . I mean . . .That is . . .") can assist the listener. Learners need practice in recognizing these speech habits as clues to deciphering meaning.

Content

Content that is familiar is easier to comprehend than content with unfamiliar vocabulary or for which the listener has insufficient background knowledge.

Visual Support

Visual support, such as video, pictures, diagrams, gestures, facial expressions, and body language, can increase comprehension if the learner is able to correctly interpret it.

What happens when we listen?

Although once labeled a passive skill, listening is very much an active process of selecting and interpreting information from auditory and visual clues (Richards, 1983; Rubin, 1995). Most of what is known about the listening process stems from research on native language development; however, as the importance of teaching listening comprehension has increased, so has the inquiry into second language listening comprehension. (See Rubin, 1994, for a comprehensive review of recent studies.)

There are several basic processes at work in listening. These do not necessarily occur sequentially; they may occur simultaneously, in rapid succession, or backward and forward as needed. The listener is not usually conscious of performing these steps, nor of switching back and forth between them. The listener:

1. determines a reason for listening;
2. takes the raw speech and deposits an image of it in short-term memory;
3. attempts to organize the information by identifying the type of speech event (conversation, lecture, radio ad) and the function of the message (persuade, inform, request);
4. predicts information expected to be included in the message;
5. recalls background information (schemata) to help interpret the message;
6. assigns a meaning to the message;
7. checks that the message has been understood;

8. determines the information to be held in long-term memory;

9. deletes the original form of the message that had been received into short-term memory (Brown 1994; Dunkel, 1986).

Each of these steps influences the techniques and activities a teacher might choose to incorporate into instruction in order to assist learners in learning to listen as well as listening to learn.

What other processes are at work?

At the same time, two types of cognitive processing are also occurring: bottom-up and top-down processing.

Top-down processing

Top-down processing refers to utilizing schemata (background knowledge and global understanding) to derive meaning from and interpret the message. For example, in preparing for training on the operation of a new floor polisher, top-down processing is activated as the learner engages in an activity that reviews what the learner already knows about using the old floor polisher. This might entail discussing the steps in the polishing process; reviewing vocabulary such as switch, on, off, etc.; or generating a list of questions that the learner would like answered in the training.

Bottom-up processing

Bottom-up processing refers to deriving the meaning of the message based on the incoming language data, from sounds, to words, to grammatical relationships, to meaning. Stress, rhythm, and intonation also play a role in bottom-up processing. Bottom-up processing would be activated as the learner is signaled to verify comprehension by the trainer/teacher asking a question using the declarative form with rising intonation ("You see that switch there?"). Practice in recognizing statements and questions that differ only in intonation help the learner develop bottom-up processing skills.

Learners need to be aware that both of these processes affect their listening comprehension, and they need to be given opportunities to practice employing each of them.

How can listening help the adult learner acquire English?

Current research and theory point to the benefit of providing a silent or pre-speaking period for the beginning-level learner (Dunkel, 1991). Delaying production gives learners the opportunity to store information in their memories. It also spares them the trauma of task overload and speaking before they are ready. The silent period may be long or short. It could comprise several class periods of listening activities that foster vocabulary and build comprehension such as in the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach. In this approach, the teacher gives a series of commands while demonstrating each one. Learners then show their comprehension by acting out the commands as repeated by the teacher. Learners themselves begin to give the commands as they feel

comfortable speaking. Or, the silent period may consist of learners listening to a tape-recorded conversation two or three times before answering questions about the content. A listening period consistent with the demands of the following productive task works to enhance rather than inhibit language acquisition and helps the more advanced-level learner as well as the beginner.

What should be considered when selecting listening techniques and activities?

What is known about the listening process and the factors that affect listening can be a guide when incorporating listening skill development into adult ESL classes. The following guidelines have been adapted from a variety of sources including Brod (1996), Brown (1994), Dunkel (1991), Mendelsohn (1994), Morley (1991), Peterson (1991), Richards (1983), and Rost (1991).

Listening should be relevant.

Because learners listen with a purpose and listen to things that interest them, accounting for the goals and experiences of the learners will keep motivation and attention high. For example, if learners at a worksite need to be able to understand new policies and procedures introduced at staff meetings, in class they should be helped to develop the abilities to identify main ideas and supporting details, to identify cause and effect, to indicate comprehension or lack of comprehension, and to ask for clarification.

Material should be authentic.

Authenticity should be evident both in language and in task. The language should reflect real discourse, including hesitations, rephrasing, and a variety of accents. Although the language needs to be comprehensible, it does not need to be constantly modified or simplified to make it easier for the level of the listener. Level of difficulty can be controlled by the selection of the task. For example, in a unit on following instructions, at the beginning level, the learner might hear a command ("May I borrow your hammer?") and respond by choosing the correct item. At an intermediate level, the learner might hear a series of instructions ("Go to the broom closet, get the floor polisher, take it to the hall in front of the cafeteria, polish the floor there, then go to the . . .") and respond appropriately by tracing the route on a floor plan of the worksite. An advanced-level learner might listen to an audio tape of an actual work meeting and write a summary of the instructions the supervisor gave the team. Use of authentic material, such as workplace training videos, audio tapes of actual workplace exchanges, and TV and radio broadcasts, increases transferability to listening outside of the ESL classroom context—to work and to community.

Opportunities to develop both top-down and bottom-up processing skills should be offered.

As mentioned above, top-down oriented activities encourage the learners to discuss what they already know about a topic, and bottom-up practice activities give confidence in accurate hearing and comprehension of the components of the language (sounds, words, intonation, grammatical structures).

The development of listening strategies should be encouraged.

Predicting, asking for clarification, and using non-verbal cues are examples of strategies that increase chances for successful listening. For example, using video can help learners develop cognitive strategies. As they view a segment with the sound off, learners can be asked to make predictions about what is happening by answering questions about setting, action, and interaction; viewing the segment again with the sound on allows them to confirm or modify their hypothesis (Rubin, 1995).

Activities should teach, not test.

Teachers should avoid using activities that tend to focus on memory rather than on the process of listening or that simply give practice rather than help learners develop listening ability. For example, simply having the learners listen to a passage followed by true/false questions might indicate how much the learners remembered rather than helping them to develop the skill of determining main idea and details. Pre- and post-listening task activities would help the learners to focus attention on what to listen for, to assess how accurately they succeeded, and to transfer the listening skill to the world beyond the classroom.

What are the steps in a listening lesson? The teacher can facilitate the development of listening ability by creating listening lessons that guide the learner through three stages: pre-listening, the listening task, and post-listening.

Engage the learners in a pre-listening activity.

This activity should establish the purpose of the listening activity and activate the schemata by encouraging the learners to think about and discuss what they already know about the content of the listening text. This activity can also provide the background needed for them to understand the text, and it can focus attention on what to listen for.

Do the listening task itself.

The task should involve the listener in getting information and in immediately doing something with it.

Engage in a post-listening activity.

This activity should help the listener to evaluate success in carrying out the task and to integrate listening with the other language skills. The teacher should encourage practice outside of the classroom whenever possible.

For example, at a worksite where schedule changes are announced at weekly team meetings, learners may need practice recognizing details such as their names, times, and dates within a longer stream of speech. A tape of such announcements may be used along with any pertinent forms or a weekly calendar. The lesson stages might proceed as follows:

Listening Lesson Example

Do a pre-listening activity: Ask the learners questions about what happens at the weekly meetings. Ask specifically about schedule changes. Show any form or the weekly calendar. Discuss its use and demonstrate how to fill it out if necessary.

Describe the task: Tell the learners they will be listening to a tape of a meeting. On the form/calendar they are to write down the schedule they hear. Demonstrate.

Have the learners do the task: Play the tape while they fill out the form.

Do a post-listening activity: Ask the learners how they thought they did. Was it easy or difficult? Why? They may listen again if they want to. Have them compare their forms with a partner or check the information by filling a form out as a whole class.

Then have the learner be the boss and write a script with schedule changes. Have them practice in pairs or small groups giving and recording schedule changes.

What kinds of listening tasks are appropriate?

There are numerous activities to choose from for developing listening skills. Lund (1990) has categorized them according to nine responses that can be observed as comprehension checks:

1. **Doing:** the listener responds physically such as in Total Physical Response (TPR);
2. **Choosing:** the listener selects from alternatives such as pictures, objects, texts, or actions;
3. **Transferring:** the listener transforms the message such as drawing a route on map, or filling in a chart;
4. **Answering:** the listener answers questions about the text;
5. **Condensing:** the listener takes notes or makes an outline;
6. **Extending:** the listener goes beyond the text by continuing the story or solving a problem;
7. **Duplicating:** the listener simply repeats or translates the message;
8. **Modeling:** the listener performs a similar task, e.g. gives instructions to a coworker after listening to a model or;
9. **Conversing:** the listener is an active participant in a face-to-face conversation.

A listening component can be built into an adult ESL lesson based on these activity response types in concert with the guidelines mentioned above. For example, choosing as a response may by used to develop bottom-up skills as learners listen to series of sentence patterns with rising and falling intonation and check column 1 (rising) or column 2 (falling) according to the pattern heard; or, the top-down skill of getting the gist of the message may be developed as learners hear

sentences describing a work task and select the appropriate picture (Peterson, 1991). An activity involving conversing might be to set up projects which call for learners to conduct interviews with native speakers outside of class on a theme related to a particular unit of study. For example, in a unit on Problem Solving on the Job, learners might ask questions about where and to whom coworkers go for help when they have a problem with a piece of equipment or with another worker or with understanding internal memos. (See Nunan and Miller (1995) and Rost (1991) for descriptions of listening tasks.)

Conclusion

Assisting learners in the development of listening comprehension is a challenge. It is a challenge that demands both the teacher's and the learner's attention because of the critical role that listening plays, not only in communication, but also in the acquisition of language. Knowledge of the listening process and factors that affect listening enable teachers to select or create listening texts and activities that meet the needs of the their adult ESL learners. Teachers, then, must weave these listening activities into the curriculum to create a balance that mirrors the real-world integration of listening with speaking, reading, and writing.

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IV-D. Study Circle on Teaching Listening, Speaking, and Pronunciation

Participant Handouts

Information for Participants

Readings

- *Improving Adult English Language Learners' Speaking Skills,* by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez. www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Speak.html
- *Improving ESL Learners' Listening Skills: At the Workplace and Beyond,* by Carol Van Duzer. www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/LISTENQA.html
- *Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills,* by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez. www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Pronun.html

Description

In this study circle, participants will be reading three pieces that explore teaching listening, speaking, and pronunciation skills in the adult ESL classroom. All three pieces briefly outline current research findings on the processes of listening, speaking, and pronunciation acquisition, and then offer practical teaching suggestions based on these findings. This study circle will allow you to familiarize yourself with scholarship from the field and provide you an opportunity to explore some of the findings in your own classroom.

Where:

When:

Study Circle Preparation

Before the first meeting of the study circle, please complete the following tasks:

- Write a short (no more than half a page) response to at least two of the following three prompts, and email your response by _____ (date) to the study circle facilitator at

  _____@_____:

  - The most effective way to teach languages is to combine all the skills in every lesson rather than trying to teach them separately.
  - Strategy use can and should be taught explicitly.
  - For adult ESL learners, speaking and listening are the most important skills.

- Read the CAELA article sent to you by the study circle facilitator and bring it with you to the first session.

Reflections on Listening Tasks (Session 1)

Tasks	Use often	Use some-times	Use rarely	Never use	Comments
Doing					
Choosing					
Transferring					
Answering					
Condensing					
Extending					
Duplicating					
Modeling					
Conversing					

Reflections on Speaking Tasks (Session 1)

Tasks	Use often	Use some-times	Use rarely	Never use	Comments
Imitative					
Intensive					
Responsive					
Transactional					
Interpersonal					
Extensive					

New Activity Planning Form for Listening and Speaking Tasks (Activity 1)

1. Which listening and speaking tasks are you planning to use?

2. Why did you choose this task/these tasks? What impact or outcomes are you hoping to see?

3. What contextual factors (e.g., class size, student levels, content focus) will you have to take into account as you plan this activity or strategy?

4. How will you implement this activity or strategy? What will you do?

5. What signs will you look for to know if the activity or strategy is having an impact on your students?

New Activity Notes for Listening and Speaking Tasks (Activity 1)

1. Describe the activity or strategy you implemented. What happened? What did you observe?

2. What struck you as interesting about what happened? How did it compare to what you expected?

3. What impact did you see the activity or strategy have on the students?

4. What problems did you experience? What changes would you make if you were to try this again?

5. What would you recommend to others about using this particular task or combination of tasks?

New Activity Planning Form for Pronunciation Instruction (Activity 2)

1. Which pronunciation feature are you planning to teach?

2. Why did you choose this feature? What impact or outcomes are you hoping to see?

3. What contextual factors (e.g., class size, student levels, content focus) will you have to take into account as you plan this activity or strategy?

4. How will you implement this activity or strategy? What will you do?

5. What signs will you look for to know if the activity or strategy is having an impact on your students?

New Activity Notes for Pronunciation Instruction (Activity 2)

1. Describe the activity or strategy you implemented. What happened? What did you observe?

2. What struck you as interesting about what happened? How did it compare to what you expected?

3. What impact did you see the activity or strategy have on the students?

4. What problems did you experience? What changes would you make if you were to try this again?

5. What would you recommend to others about teaching this particular pronunciation feature?

Evaluation Form

1. How useful did you find the study circle material? Please explain.

2. How useful did you find the study circle meetings? Please explain.

3. How useful did you find the intersession activities? Please explain.

4. What tools or ideas are you taking away that you will continue to use in your practice?

5. If this study circle is offered again, what advice would you give the facilitator?

6. On what other topics would you like to have a study circle?

Suggested Reading List

The following journals and their searchable archives are available online. A sample of relevant articles from each is provided.

ELT Journal, http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org
An international journal, published by Oxford University Press, linking theory and practice in ELT. Full text is available online in PDF.

Eastment, D. (2004). Listening materials…and how to find them. *ELT Journal, 58*(1), 97–99.

Ho, Y. K. (2003). Audiotaped dialogue journals: An alternative form of speaking practice. *ELT Journal, 57*(3), 269–277.

Ridgway, T. (2000). Listening strategies—I beg your pardon? *ELT Journal, 54*(2), 179–185.

The Internet TESL Journal, http://iteslj.org
A monthly Web journal including articles, research papers, lesson plans, and teaching techniques as well as links of interest to teachers of English as a second language.

Chou, Y. L. (2004). Promoting learners' speaking ability by socioaffective strategies. *ITESLJ, 10*(9).

Fryer, L. K. (2005). Minimal pair card game for improving pronunciation and listening. *ITESLJ, 11*(9).

Greer, T. (2004). A quick way to improve /r/ and /l/ pronunciation. *ITESLJ, 10*(8).

TESL-Electronic Journal, http://tesl-ej.org
A Web journal with about two issues per year featuring articles on research and teaching techniques. A good source for book reviews.

Chen, Y. (2005). Barriers to acquiring listening strategies for EFL learners and their pedagogical implications. *TESL EJ, 8*(4).

Schneider, P. H. (2001). Pair taping: Increasing motivation and achievement with a fluency practice. *TESL EJ, 5*(2).

Improving Adult English Language Learners' Speaking Skills

MaryAnn Cunningham Florez
National Center for ESL Literacy Education
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Communicative and whole language instructional approaches promote integration of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in ways that reflect natural language use. But opportunities for speaking and listening require structure and planning if they are to support language development. This digest describes what speaking involves and what good speakers do in the process of expressing themselves. It also presents an outline for creating an effective speaking lesson and for assessing learners' speaking skills.

Oral communication skills in adult ESL instruction

Outside the classroom, listening is used twice as often as speaking, which in turn is used twice as much as reading and writing (Rivers, 1981). Inside the classroom, speaking and listening are the most often used skills (Brown, 1994). They are recognized as critical for functioning in an English language context, both by teachers and by learners. These skills are also logical instructional starting points when learners have low literacy levels (in English or their native language) or limited formal education, or when they come from language backgrounds with a non-Roman script or a predominantly oral tradition. Further, with the drive to incorporate workforce readiness skills into adult ESL instruction, practice time is being devoted to such speaking skills as reporting, negotiating, clarifying, and problem solving (Grognet, 1997).

What speaking is

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing *and* receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Language functions (or patterns) that tend to recur in certain discourse situations (e.g., declining an invitation or requesting time off from work), can be identified and charted (Burns & Joyce, 1997). For example, when a salesperson asks "May I help you?" the expected discourse sequence includes a statement of need, response to the need, offer of appreciation, acknowledgement of the appreciation, and a leave-taking exchange. Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary *(linguistic competence)*, but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language *(sociolinguistic competence)*. Finally, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Cohen, 1996). A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

What a good speaker does

A speaker's skills and speech habits have an impact on the success of any exchange (Van Duzer, 1997). Speakers must be able to anticipate and then produce the expected patterns of specific discourse situations. They must also manage discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting (Burns & Joyce, 1997). For example, a learner involved in the exchange with the salesperson described previously must know the usual pattern that such an interaction follows and access that knowledge as the exchange progresses. The learner must also choose the correct vocabulary to describe the item sought, rephrase or emphasize words to clarify the description if the clerk does not understand, and use appropriate facial expressions to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service. Other skills and knowledge that instruction might address include the following:

- producing the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures, and intonations of the language;
- using grammar structures accurately;
- assessing characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations of participants, interest levels, or differences in perspectives;
- selecting vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate for the audience, the topic being discussed, and the setting in which the speech act occurs;
- applying strategies to enhance comprehensibility, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, or checking for listener comprehension;
- using gestures or body language; and
- paying attention to the success of the interaction and adjusting components of speech such as vocabulary, rate of speech, and complexity of grammar structures to maximize listener comprehension and involvement (Brown, 1994).

Teachers should monitor learners' speech production to determine what skills and knowledge they already have and what areas need development. Bailey and Savage's *New Ways in Teaching Speaking* (1994), and Lewis's *New Ways in Teaching Adults* (1997) offer suggestions for activities that can address different skills.

General outline of a speaking lesson

Speaking lessons can follow the usual pattern of preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and extension. The teacher can use the *preparation* step to establish a context for the speaking task (where, when, why, and with whom it will occur) and to initiate awareness of the speaking skill to be targeted (asking for clarification, stressing key words, using reduced forms of words). In *presentation*, the teacher can provide learners with a preproduction model that furthers learner

comprehension and helps them become more attentive observers of language use. *Practice* involves learners in reproducing the targeted structure, usually in a controlled or highly supported manner. *Evaluation* involves directing attention to the skill being examined and asking learners to monitor and assess their own progress. Finally, *extension* consists of activities that ask learners to use the strategy or skill in a different context or authentic communicative situation, or to integrate use of the new skill or strategy with previously acquired ones (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1995).

Example of a speaking lesson

Choosing appropriate topics for small talk

1. **Preparation.** Show the learners a picture of two people conversing in a familiar casual setting. (The setting will be determined by a prior needs assessment.) Ask them to brainstorm what the people might be discussing (i.e., what topics, vocabulary, typical phrases).
2. **Presentation.** Present several video clips of small talk in casual situations. Have learners complete a worksheet in which they describe or list the topics discussed, the context in which the speech is occurring, and any phrases that seem to typify small talk. Follow up with a discussion of the kinds of topics that are appropriate for small talk, the factors in the specific situations that affect topic selection (e.g., relationships of participants, physical setting), and typical phrases used in small talk. Chart this information.
3. **Practice.** Give learners specific information about the participants and the setting of a scenario where small talk will take place. In pairs, have them list topics that might be discussed by the participants and simple phrases they might use. Learners then engage in improvised dialogues based on these simple phrases.
4. **Evaluation.** Give pairs a teacher-prepared dialogue based on their scenario from š. Ask them to compare their improvised dialogues with the prepared dialogue, analyzing the similarities, differences, and reasons for both.
5. **Extension.** Have learners go individually or in small groups into various contexts in the community (work, school, church, bus stop) and record the conversations they hear. Ask them to report their findings back to the class, and then have the class discuss these findings.

In-class speaking tasks

Although dialogues and conversations are the most obvious and most often used speaking activities in language classrooms, a teacher can select activities from a variety of tasks. Brown (1994) lists six possible task categories:

1. **Imitative**—Drills in which the learner simply repeats a phrase or structure (e.g., "Excuse me." or "Can you help me?") for clarity and accuracy;
2. **Intensive**—Drills or repetitions focusing on specific phonological or grammatical points, such as minimal pairs or repetition of a series of imperative sentences;

3. **Responsive**—Short replies to teacher or learner questions or comments, such as a series of answers to yes/no questions;

4. **Transactional**—Dialogues conducted for the purpose of information exchange, such as information-gathering interviews, role plays, or debates;

5. **Interpersonal**—Dialogues to establish or maintain social relationships, such as personal interviews or casual conversation role plays; and

6. **Extensive—**Extended monologues such as short speeches, oral reports, or oral summaries.

These tasks are not sequential. Each can be used independently or they can be integrated with one another, depending on learners' needs. For example, if learners are not using appropriate sentence intonations when participating in a *transactional* activity that focuses on the skill of politely interrupting to make a point, the teacher might decide to follow up with a brief *imitative* lesson targeting this feature.

When presenting tasks, teachers should tell learners about the language function to be produced in the task and the real context(s) in which it usually occurs. They should provide opportunities for interactive practice and build upon previous instruction as necessary (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Teachers should also be careful not to overload a speaking lesson with other new material such as numerous vocabulary or grammatical structures. This can distract learners from the primary speaking goals of the lesson.

Assessing speaking

Speaking assessments can take many forms, from oral sections of standardized tests such as the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) or the English as a Second Language Oral Assessment (ESLOA) to authentic assessments such as progress checklists, analysis of taped speech samples, or anecdotal records of speech in classroom interactions. Assessment instruments should reflect instruction and be incorporated from the beginning stages of lesson planning (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). For example, if a lesson focuses on producing and recognizing signals for turn-taking in a group discussion, the assessment tool might be a checklist to be completed by the teacher or learners in the course of the learners' participation in the discussion. Finally, criteria should be clearly defined and understandable to both the teacher and the learners.

Conclusion

Speaking is key to communication. By considering what good speakers do, what speaking tasks can be used in class, and what specific needs learners report, teachers can help learners improve their speaking and overall oral competency.

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Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills

MaryAnn Cunningham Florez
National Center for ESL Literacy Education
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Observations that limited pronunciation skills can undermine learners' self-confidence, restrict social interactions, and negatively influence estimations of a speaker's credibility and abilities are not new (Morley, 1998). However, the current focus on communicative approaches to English as a second language (ESL) instruction and the concern for building teamwork and communication skills in an increasingly diverse workplace are renewing interest in the role that pronunciation plays in adults' overall communicative competence. As a result, pronunciation is emerging from its often marginalized place in adult ESL instruction. This digest reviews the current status of pronunciation instruction in adult ESL classes. It provides an overview of the factors that influence pronunciation mastery and suggests ways to plan and implement pronunciation instruction.

Historical Perspective

Pronunciation instruction tends to be linked to the instructional method being used (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). In the grammar-translation method of the past, pronunciation was almost irrelevant and therefore seldom taught. In the audio-lingual method, learners spent hours in the language lab listening to and repeating sounds and sound combinations. With the emergence of more holistic, communicative methods and approaches to ESL instruction, pronunciation is addressed within the context of real communication (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Morley, 1991).

Factors Influencing Pronunciation Mastery

Research has contributed some important data on factors that can influence the learning and teaching of pronunciation skills. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, (1996), Gillette (1994), Graham (1994) and Pennington (1994) discuss the following factors.

Age. The debate over the impact of age on language acquisition and specifically pronunciation is varied. Some researchers argue that, after puberty, lateralization (the assigning of linguistic functions to the different brain hemispheres) is completed, and adults' ability to distinguish and produce native-like sounds is more limited. Others refer to the existence of sensitive periods when various aspects of language acquisition occur, or to adults' need to re-adjust existing neural networks to accommodate new sounds. Most researchers, however, agree that adults find pronunciation more difficult than children do and that they probably will not achieve native-like pronunciation. Yet experiences with language learning and the ability to self-monitor, which come with age, can offset these limitations to some degree.

Amount and type of prior pronunciation instruction. Prior experiences with pronunciation instruction may influence learners' success with current efforts. Learners at higher language proficiency levels may have developed habitual, systematic pronunciation errors that must be identified and addressed.

Aptitude. Individual capacity for learning languages has been debated. Some researchers believe all learners have the same capacity to learn a second language because they have learned a first language. Others assert that the ability to recognize and internalize foreign sounds may be unequally developed in different learners.

Learner attitude and motivation. Nonlinguistic factors related to an individual's personality and learning goals can influence achievement in pronunciation. Attitude toward the target language, culture, and native speakers; degree of acculturation (including exposure to and use of the target language); personal identity issues; and motivation for learning can all support or impede pronunciation skills development.

Native language. Most researchers agree that the learner's first language influences the pronunciation of the target language and is a significant factor in accounting for foreign accents. So-called interference or negative transfer from the first language is likely to cause errors in aspiration, intonation, and rhythm in the target language.

The pronunciation of any one learner might be affected by a combination of these factors. The key is to be aware of their existence so that they may be considered in creating realistic and effective pronunciation goals and development plans for the learners. For example, native-like pronunciation is not likely to be a realistic goal for older learners; a learner who is a native speaker of a tonal language, such as Vietnamese, will need assistance with different pronunciation features than will a native Spanish speaker; and a twenty-three year old engineer who knows he will be more respected and possibly promoted if his pronunciation improves is likely to be responsive to direct pronunciation instruction.

Language Features Involved in Pronunciation

Two groups of features are involved in pronunciation: segmentals and suprasegmentals. *Segmentals* are the basic inventory of distinctive sounds and the way that they combine to form a spoken language. In the case of North American English, this inventory is comprised of 40 phonemes (15 vowels and 25 consonants), which are the basic sounds that serve to distinguish words from one another. Pronunciation instruction has often concentrated on the mastery of segmentals through discrimination and production of target sounds via drills consisting of minimal pairs like /bæd/-/bæt/ or /sIt/-/sît/.

Suprasegmentals transcend the level of individual sound production. They extend across segmentals and are often produced unconsciously by native speakers. Since suprasegmental elements provide crucial context and support (they determine meaning) for segmental production, they

are assuming a more prominent place in pronunciation instruction (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Gilbert, 1990; Morley, 1991). Suprasegmentals include the following:

- **stress**—a combination of length, loudness, and pitch applied to syllables in a word (e.g., Happy, FOOTball);
- **rhythm**—the regular, patterned beat of stressed and unstressed syllables and pauses (e.g., with weak syllables in lower case and stressed syllables in upper case: they WANT to GO Later.);
- **adjustments in connected speech**—modifications of sounds within and between words in streams of speech (e.g., "ask him," /æsk hIm/ becomes /æs kIm/);
- **prominence**—speaker's act of highlighting words to emphasize meaning or intent (e.g., Give me the BLUE one. (not the yellow one); and
- **intonation**—the rising and falling of voice pitch across phrases and sentences (e.g., Are you REAdy?).

Incorporating Pronunciation in the Curriculum

In general, programs should start by establishing long range oral communication goals and objectives that identify pronunciation needs as well as speech functions and the contexts in which they might occur (Morley, 1998). These goals and objectives should be realistic, aiming for functional intelligibility (ability to make oneself relatively easily understood), functional communicability (ability to meet the communication needs one faces), and enhanced self-confidence in use (Gillette, 1994; Jordan, 1992; Morley, 1998). They should result from a careful analysis and description of the learners' needs (Jordan, 1992; Morley, 1998). This analysis should then be used to support selection and sequencing of the pronunciation information and skills for each sub-group or proficiency level within the larger learner group (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996).

To determine the level of emphasis to be placed on pronunciation within the curriculum, programs need to consider certain variables specific to their contexts.

- **the learners** (ages, educational backgrounds, experiences with pronunciation instruction, motivations, general English proficiency levels)
- **the instructional setting** (academic, workplace, English for specific purposes, literacy, conversation, family literacy)
- **institutional variables** (teachers' instructional and educational experiences, focus of curriculum, availability of pronunciation materials, class size, availability of equipment)
- **linguistic variables** (learners' native languages, diversity or lack of diversity of native languages within the group)
- **methodological variables** (method or approach embraced by the program)

Incorporating Pronunciation in Instruction

Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996) propose a framework that supports a communicative-cognitive approach to teaching pronunciation. Preceded by a planning stage to identify learners' needs, pedagogical priorities, and teachers' readiness to teach pronunciation, the framework for the teaching stage of the framework offers a structure for creating effective pronunciation lessons and activities on the sound system and other features of North American English pronunciation.

- description and analysis of the pronunciation feature to be targeted (raises learner awareness of the specific feature)
- listening discrimination activities (learners listen for and practice recognizing the targeted feature)
- controlled practice and feedback (support learner production of the feature in a controlled context)
- guided practice and feedback (offer structured communication exercises in which learners can produce and monitor for the targeted feature)
- communicative practice and feedback (provides opportunities for the learner to focus on content but also get feedback on where specific pronunciation instruction is needed).

A lesson on word stress, based on this framework, might look like the following:

1. The teacher presents a list of vocabulary items from the current lesson, employing both correct and incorrect word stress. After discussing the words and eliciting (if appropriate) learners' opinions on which are the correct versions, the concept of word stress is introduced and modeled.
2. Learners listen for and identify stressed syllables, using sequences of nonsense syllables of varying lengths (e.g., da-DA, da-da-DA-da).
3. Learners go back to the list of vocabulary items from step one and, in unison, indicate the correct stress patterns of each word by clapping, emphasizing the stressed syllables with louder claps. New words can be added to the list for continued practice if necessary.
4. In pairs, learners take turns reading a scripted dialogue. As one learner speaks, the other marks the stress patterns on a printed copy. Learners provide one another with feedback on their production and discrimination.
5. Learners make oral presentations to the class on topics related to their current lesson. Included in the assessment criteria for the activity are correct production and evidence of self-monitoring of word stress.

In addition to careful planning, teachers must be responsive to learners needs and explore a variety of methods to help learners comprehend pronunciation features. Useful exercises include the following:

- Have learners touch their throats to feel vibration or no vibration in sound production, to understand voicing.
- Have learners use mirrors to see placement of tongue and lips or shape of the mouth.
- Have learners use kazoos to provide reinforcement of intonation patterns
- Have learners stretch rubber bands to illustrate lengths of vowels.
- Provide visual or auditory associations for a sound (a buzzing bee demonstrates the pronunciation of /z/).
- Ask learners to hold up fingers to indicate numbers of syllables in words.

Conclusion

Pronunciation can be one of the most difficult parts of a language for adult learners to master and one of the least favorite topics for teachers to address in the classroom. Nevertheless, with careful preparation and integration, pronunciation can play an important role in supporting learners' overall communicative power.

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Improving ESL Learners' Listening Skills: At the Workplace and Beyond

Carol Van Duzer
Center for Applied Linguistics
Project in Adult Immigrant Education (PAIE)
February 1997

Listening is a critical element in the competent language performance of adult second language learners, whether they are communicating at school, at work, or in the community. Through the normal course of a day, listening is used nearly twice as much as speaking and four to five times as much as reading and writing (Rivers, 1981). In a recent study of Fortune 500 Corporations, Wolvin and Coakley (1991) found that listening was perceived to be crucial for communication at work with regards to entry-level employment, job success, general career competence, managerial competency, and effectiveness of relationships between supervisors and subordinates. Yet listening remains one of the least understood processes in language learning despite the recognition of the critical role it plays both in communication and in language acquisition (Morley, 1991). As language teaching has moved toward comprehension-based approaches, listening to learn has become an important element in the adult English as a second language (ESL) classroom (Lund, 1990).

This Q&A summarizes what is known about the listening process as it relates to adult second language learners; it discusses the factors affecting listening; it describes the listening process; it suggests guidelines to consider in teaching listening; and it gives examples of activities for practicing and developing listening skills in adults learning English as a second language. Although most of the activities described have a workplace program context, the same types of activities could be used in any adult ESL class to improve learners' listening in all facets of life: at school, at work, or in the community.

What are some factors that affect the listening process?

Listening is a demanding process, not only because of the complexity of the process itself, but also due to factors that characterize the listener, the speaker, the content of the message, and any visual support that accompanies the message (Brown & Yule, 1983).

The Listener

Interest in a topic increases the listener's comprehension; the listener may tune out topics that are not of interest. A listener who is an active participant in a conversation generally has more background knowledge to facilitate understanding of the topic than a listener who is, in effect, eavesdropping on a conversation between two people whose communication has been recorded on an audiotape. Further, the ability to use negotiation skills, such as asking for clarification, repetition, or definition of points not understood, enable a listener to make sense of the incoming information.

The Speaker

Colloquial language and reduced forms make comprehension more difficult. The extent to which the speaker uses these language forms impacts comprehension. The more exposure the listener has to them, the greater the ability to comprehend. A speaker's rate of delivery may be too fast, too slow, or have too many hesitations for a listener to follow. Awareness of a speaker's corrections and use of rephrasing ("er. . . I mean . . .That is . . .") can assist the listener. Learners need practice in recognizing these speech habits as clues to deciphering meaning.

Content

Content that is familiar is easier to comprehend than content with unfamiliar vocabulary or for which the listener has insufficient background knowledge.

Visual Support

Visual support, such as video, pictures, diagrams, gestures, facial expressions, and body language, can increase comprehension if the learner is able to correctly interpret it.

What happens when we listen?

Although once labeled a passive skill, listening is very much an active process of selecting and interpreting information from auditory and visual clues (Richards, 1983; Rubin, 1995). Most of what is known about the listening process stems from research on native language development; however, as the importance of teaching listening comprehension has increased, so has the inquiry into second language listening comprehension. (See Rubin, 1994, for a comprehensive review of recent studies.)

There are several basic processes at work in listening. These do not necessarily occur sequentially; they may occur simultaneously, in rapid succession, or backward and forward as needed. The listener is not usually conscious of performing these steps, nor of switching back and forth between them. The listener:

1. determines a reason for listening;
2. takes the raw speech and deposits an image of it in short-term memory;
3. attempts to organize the information by identifying the type of speech event (conversation, lecture, radio ad) and the function of the message (persuade, inform, request);
4. predicts information expected to be included in the message;
5. recalls background information (schemata) to help interpret the message;
6. assigns a meaning to the message;
7. checks that the message has been understood;

8. determines the information to be held in long-term memory;

9. deletes the original form of the message that had been received into short-term memory (Brown 1994; Dunkel, 1986).

Each of these steps influences the techniques and activities a teacher might choose to incorporate into instruction in order to assist learners in learning to listen as well as listening to learn.

What other processes are at work?

At the same time, two types of cognitive processing are also occurring: bottom-up and top-down processing.

Top-down processing

Top-down processing refers to utilizing schemata (background knowledge and global understanding) to derive meaning from and interpret the message. For example, in preparing for training on the operation of a new floor polisher, top-down processing is activated as the learner engages in an activity that reviews what the learner already knows about using the old floor polisher. This might entail discussing the steps in the polishing process; reviewing vocabulary such as switch, on, off, etc.; or generating a list of questions that the learner would like answered in the training.

Bottom-up processing

Bottom-up processing refers to deriving the meaning of the message based on the incoming language data, from sounds, to words, to grammatical relationships, to meaning. Stress, rhythm, and intonation also play a role in bottom-up processing. Bottom-up processing would be activated as the learner is signaled to verify comprehension by the trainer/teacher asking a question using the declarative form with rising intonation ("You see that switch there?"). Practice in recognizing statements and questions that differ only in intonation help the learner develop bottom-up processing skills.

Learners need to be aware that both of these processes affect their listening comprehension, and they need to be given opportunities to practice employing each of them.

How can listening help the adult learner acquire English?

Current research and theory point to the benefit of providing a silent or pre-speaking period for the beginning-level learner (Dunkel, 1991). Delaying production gives learners the opportunity to store information in their memories. It also spares them the trauma of task overload and speaking before they are ready. The silent period may be long or short. It could comprise several class periods of listening activities that foster vocabulary and build comprehension such as in the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach. In this approach, the teacher gives a series of commands while demonstrating each one. Learners then show their comprehension by acting out the commands as repeated by the teacher. Learners themselves begin to give the commands as they feel

comfortable speaking. Or, the silent period may consist of learners listening to a tape-recorded conversation two or three times before answering questions about the content. A listening period consistent with the demands of the following productive task works to enhance rather than inhibit language acquisition and helps the more advanced-level learner as well as the beginner.

What should be considered when selecting listening techniques and activities?

What is known about the listening process and the factors that affect listening can be a guide when incorporating listening skill development into adult ESL classes. The following guidelines have been adapted from a variety of sources including Brod (1996), Brown (1994), Dunkel (1991), Mendelsohn (1994), Morley (1991), Peterson (1991), Richards (1983), and Rost (1991).

Listening should be relevant.

Because learners listen with a purpose and listen to things that interest them, accounting for the goals and experiences of the learners will keep motivation and attention high. For example, if learners at a worksite need to be able to understand new policies and procedures introduced at staff meetings, in class they should be helped to develop the abilities to identify main ideas and supporting details, to identify cause and effect, to indicate comprehension or lack of comprehension, and to ask for clarification.

Material should be authentic.

Authenticity should be evident both in language and in task. The language should reflect real discourse, including hesitations, rephrasing, and a variety of accents. Although the language needs to be comprehensible, it does not need to be constantly modified or simplified to make it easier for the level of the listener. Level of difficulty can be controlled by the selection of the task. For example, in a unit on following instructions, at the beginning level, the learner might hear a command ("May I borrow your hammer?") and respond by choosing the correct item. At an intermediate level, the learner might hear a series of instructions ("Go to the broom closet, get the floor polisher, take it to the hall in front of the cafeteria, polish the floor there, then go to the . . .") and respond appropriately by tracing the route on a floor plan of the worksite. An advanced-level learner might listen to an audio tape of an actual work meeting and write a summary of the instructions the supervisor gave the team. Use of authentic material, such as workplace training videos, audio tapes of actual workplace exchanges, and TV and radio broadcasts, increases transferability to listening outside of the ESL classroom context—to work and to community.

Opportunities to develop both top-down and bottom-up processing skills should be offered.

As mentioned above, top-down oriented activities encourage the learners to discuss what they already know about a topic, and bottom-up practice activities give confidence in accurate hearing and comprehension of the components of the language (sounds, words, intonation, grammatical structures).

The development of listening strategies should be encouraged.

Predicting, asking for clarification, and using non-verbal cues are examples of strategies that increase chances for successful listening. For example, using video can help learners develop cognitive strategies. As they view a segment with the sound off, learners can be asked to make predictions about what is happening by answering questions about setting, action, and interaction; viewing the segment again with the sound on allows them to confirm or modify their hypothesis (Rubin, 1995).

Activities should teach, not test.

Teachers should avoid using activities that tend to focus on memory rather than on the process of listening or that simply give practice rather than help learners develop listening ability. For example, simply having the learners listen to a passage followed by true/false questions might indicate how much the learners remembered rather than helping them to develop the skill of determining main idea and details. Pre- and post-listening task activities would help the learners to focus attention on what to listen for, to assess how accurately they succeeded, and to transfer the listening skill to the world beyond the classroom.

What are the steps in a listening lesson? The teacher can facilitate the development of listening ability by creating listening lessons that guide the learner through three stages: pre-listening, the listening task, and post-listening.

Engage the learners in a pre-listening activity.

This activity should establish the purpose of the listening activity and activate the schemata by encouraging the learners to think about and discuss what they already know about the content of the listening text. This activity can also provide the background needed for them to understand the text, and it can focus attention on what to listen for.

Do the listening task itself.

The task should involve the listener in getting information and in immediately doing something with it.

Engage in a post-listening activity.

This activity should help the listener to evaluate success in carrying out the task and to integrate listening with the other language skills. The teacher should encourage practice outside of the classroom whenever possible.

For example, at a worksite where schedule changes are announced at weekly team meetings, learners may need practice recognizing details such as their names, times, and dates within a longer stream of speech. A tape of such announcements may be used along with any pertinent forms or a weekly calendar. The lesson stages might proceed as follows:

Listening Lesson Example

Do a pre-listening activity: Ask the learners questions about what happens at the weekly meetings. Ask specifically about schedule changes. Show any form or the weekly calendar. Discuss its use and demonstrate how to fill it out if necessary.

Describe the task: Tell the learners they will be listening to a tape of a meeting. On the form/calendar they are to write down the schedule they hear. Demonstrate.

Have the learners do the task: Play the tape while they fill out the form.

Do a post-listening activity: Ask the learners how they thought they did. Was it easy or difficult? Why? They may listen again if they want to. Have them compare their forms with a partner or check the information by filling a form out as a whole class.

Then have the learner be the boss and write a script with schedule changes. Have them practice in pairs or small groups giving and recording schedule changes.

What kinds of listening tasks are appropriate?

There are numerous activities to choose from for developing listening skills. Lund (1990) has categorized them according to nine responses that can be observed as comprehension checks:

1. **Doing:** the listener responds physically such as in Total Physical Response (TPR);
2. **Choosing:** the listener selects from alternatives such as pictures, objects, texts, or actions;
3. **Transferring:** the listener transforms the message such as drawing a route on map, or filling in a chart;
4. **Answering:** the listener answers questions about the text;
5. **Condensing:** the listener takes notes or makes an outline;
6. **Extending:** the listener goes beyond the text by continuing the story or solving a problem;
7. **Duplicating:** the listener simply repeats or translates the message;
8. **Modeling:** the listener performs a similar task, e.g. gives instructions to a coworker after listening to a model or;
9. **Conversing:** the listener is an active participant in a face-to-face conversation.

A listening component can be built into an adult ESL lesson based on these activity response types in concert with the guidelines mentioned above. For example, choosing as a response may by used to develop bottom-up skills as learners listen to series of sentence patterns with rising and falling intonation and check column 1 (rising) or column 2 (falling) according to the pattern heard; or, the top-down skill of getting the gist of the message may be developed as learners hear

sentences describing a work task and select the appropriate picture (Peterson, 1991). An activity involving conversing might be to set up projects which call for learners to conduct interviews with native speakers outside of class on a theme related to a particular unit of study. For example, in a unit on Problem Solving on the Job, learners might ask questions about where and to whom coworkers go for help when they have a problem with a piece of equipment or with another worker or with understanding internal memos. (See Nunan and Miller (1995) and Rost (1991) for descriptions of listening tasks.)

Conclusion

Assisting learners in the development of listening comprehension is a challenge. It is a challenge that demands both the teacher's and the learner's attention because of the critical role that listening plays, not only in communication, but also in the acquisition of language. Knowledge of the listening process and factors that affect listening enable teachers to select or create listening texts and activities that meet the needs of the their adult ESL learners. Teachers, then, must weave these listening activities into the curriculum to create a balance that mirrors the real-world integration of listening with speaking, reading, and writing.

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