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HIGHER EDUCATION LANGUAGE AND PRESENTATION SUPPORT

Practising Pronunciation

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Workshop Objectives

- Identify **different features** of good pronunciation
- Identify and discuss pronunciation **difficulties**
- **Practise** improving the different features of pronunciation
- Receive **feedback** on pronunciation performance



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Discussion

- What is the difference between ***pronunciation*** and ***accent***?
- What do you think “good” pronunciation is?
- What do you do to improve your pronunciation?

Everybody has an accent, whether English is your first language or not. (e.g. Australian accent, Received pronunciation (British) accent, Scottish accent, Canadian accent, General American, New York accent, Korean accent, Indian accent, French accent etc). Kofi Annan and Ban Ki Moon are examples of English speakers who have intelligible pronunciation but don't have a General American accent or British received Pronunciation accent.

Good pronunciation is usually judged by **intelligibility**, not by sounding like a BBC news reader or some other such benchmark. Pronunciation involves more than just how individual words are said – for example, where the pauses are, how the voice rises or falls, which words are stressed to convey meaning etc. and these features will be practised in this workshop series.

There are so many things people can do to improve their pronunciation (e.g. using a system of notation for sounds, stress, pauses etc., asking friends for feedback, recording yourself, practising sounds using a mirror, learning a phonetic script, singing songs in English, reading aloud, watching TV shows or talks and trying to parallel speak with the speaker etc etc)

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HELPS Buddy Program

Meet a volunteer at UTS 1 hour each week for conversation practice

Volunteers are students, staff, alumni or working outside of UTS.

Learn about **Australian culture**

Improve your **conversation skills**, including your **pronunciation**

Some students **exchange languages** eg. English/Mandarin; English/French

Join Buddy **events** and make more friends

'It was more like if we meet a friend'

'I think it helped me to follow the speed of native English speakers'.

Buddy Program

<http://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/helps/english-speaking-practice/helpsmates-buddy-program>

Conversations@UTS

<http://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/helps/english-speaking-practice>



For the following slides, you will work in pairs or small groups.

You will need to say the following words or sentences **aloud**; or listen to recordings.

These exercises are designed to highlight various aspects of pronunciation.

You should reflect on any difficulties you are having.

Exercise: Sounds

What does this say?

/də ju: nəʊ haʊ tə ri:d fə'netɪk 'sɪmbəlz/ ?

The transcription reads: “Do you know how to read phonetic symbols”? The transcription also includes the weak forms for “do” and “to”.

Using phonemic script is not essential but it can be helpful when keeping a record of words you have difficulty pronouncing.

E.g. If you are giving a presentation and there are a few key words that must be pronounced properly (so that your audience understands you), you can use the phonemic script to keep a record of the way these words are pronounced and then practise these words. You can also record and listen to yourself on your phone or ask someone else to listen to you saying these words.

Exercise: Consonant sounds

The following groups of words have similar pronunciation. Say them aloud. Are you able to clearly differentiate between them?

- *ice* *eyes*
- *correct* *collect*
- *sank* *thank* *tank*
- *fear* *peer* *beer* *veer* *weir*
- *sick* *six* *sixth*

The words in these groups are minimally different due to a different CONSONANT sound. Depending on one's first language, it may be difficult to clearly differentiate between some of them.

Exercise: Vowel sounds

The following groups of words have similar pronunciation. Say them aloud. Are you able to clearly differentiate between them?

- *walk* *wake* *work*
- *pen* *pan*
- *been* *bin*
- *drunk* *drank*
- *pepper* *paper*
- *cold* *called*
- *Ken's* *Cairns*

The words in these groups are minimally different due to a different VOWEL sound. Depending on one's first language, it may be difficult to clearly differentiate between some of them.

Although English has only 5 written vowels, there are at least 20 spoken vowels including short vowel sounds, long vowel sounds and diphthongs. Many languages have fewer vowel sounds than English and so speakers of English as a second language may try to cover all the English vowel sounds with a much smaller repertoire of sounds.

Exercise: Spelling and pronunciation

Try saying the following sentences aloud.
What do you notice about English spelling?

- *The bandage was wound around the wound.*
- *We must polish the Polish furniture.*
- *The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.*
- *Make thorough use of this recipe to cure a cough and hiccough and cook the rough dough.*

English spelling and pronunciation has been shaped by so many languages and events throughout history. There is not the one-to-one relationship between spelling and pronunciation as there is in other languages (e.g. Italian, Turkish)

Exercise: Stress and syllables

Try saying the following words aloud.

How many syllables does each word have? Which syllable is stressed?

What do you notice?

- | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| ○ <i>Australia</i> | <i>Australian</i> | |
| ○ <i>govern</i> | <i>government</i> | |
| ○ <i>technology</i> | <i>technological</i> | |
| ○ <i>politics</i> | <i>politician</i> | <i>political</i> |
| ○ <i>record (noun)</i> | <i>record (verb)</i> | |

Stressing the right syllable in a long word can make the difference in being understood or not. Many academic words are multisyllabic.

It is a good idea to:

- write down any words you are having difficulty with (especially key vocabulary for presentations),
- break the word up into syllables, and practise saying each syllable separately (with the correct vowel and consonant sounds)
- make note of the stress pattern in that word, and practise saying the word with the correct syllable stressed

Note that in many words, when suffixes are used to make different parts of speech (verb/noun/adjective/adverb), a different syllable is stressed (e.g. politics, politician, political)

There are many words that have the same form/spelling for both a noun and a verb (e.g. produce, refuse, object, record, import). However, when used as a noun the first syllable is stressed and when used as a verb the second syllable is stressed.

Students should devise their own way of notating stress (eg. underline the stressed syllable, capitalise the stressed syllable, a mark over the stressed syllable etc.)

Exercise: Stress in sentences/ utterances

Look at the instructions from a lecturer.
Which words do you think will be stressed? Why?

*“You’ll all be giving your presentations in week eight,
so you should start to do your research this week.”*

Stressing key words in sentences helps to communicate meaning and is therefore very important. When giving a presentation it is vital to highlight information by stressing key words.

Stressed syllables are longer and louder than unstressed syllables. This contrast is how the English language works.

The speaker uses the most stress for the words that they consider to be most important. Stressed syllables in key/ focus words also carry some change in pitch.

Exercise: Stress in sentences/ utterances

Now listen to the recording

*“You’ll all be giving your presentations in week eight /
so you should start
to do your research this week.”*



In this recording, the speaker has stressed *all, giving, presentations, week 8, start, research, this week*.

The focus words with the most stress are *eight, start* and *this*

Exercise: Stress in sentences/ utterances

On the next slide, listen to the recording of the following sentence said 5 ways.
How does the stress change the meaning?

I think you 're right.

Exercise: Stress in sentences/ utterances

I think you 're RIGHT

I think YOU 'RE right

I THINK you 're right

I think you 're right



I think you 're RIGHT
General agreement

I think YOU 'RE right
I agree with you, but not with other people

I THINK you 're right
I agree, but I still have doubts

I think you 're right
I agree with you even if others don ' t.

Exercise: Chunking and Pausing

Listen to the recordings on the following three slides.

Which one is easier to understand? Why?

When speakers use meaningful pauses and divide their speech into “chunks”, they are ‘packaging’ the information for listeners.

A chunk can be a single word, a phrase or a whole sentence.

In each chunk the most important word is given the most emphasis/ stress. Pitch change occurs on this word (tonic stress).

Pauses are particularly important when giving presentations in order to break up information into sizable chunks. When you want to signal a new topic, a long pause is necessary (along with words and phrases that signal a transition and non-verbal cues such as hand gestures or shifting position)

Exercise: Chunking and Pausing**Recording 1**

In this recording the speaker uses no pauses or chunking. It is difficult to understand.

Exercise: Chunking and Pausing**Recording 2**

In this recording the speaker uses pauses and chunking. However, the pauses are INAPPROPRIATELY placed. Therefore, it is difficult to understand.

Exercise: Chunking and Pausing**Recording 3**

In this recording the speaker has used pauses and chunking meaningfully. It is much easier to understand.

When speakers use meaningful pauses and divide their speech into “chunks”, they are ‘packaging’ the information for listeners.

A chunk can be a single word, a phrase or a whole sentence.

In each chunk the most important word is given the most emphasis/ stress. Pitch change occurs on this word

Pauses are particularly important when giving presentations in order to break up information into sizable chunks. When you want to signal a new topic, a long pause is necessary (along with words and phrases that signal a transition and non-verbal cues such as hand gestures or shifting position)

Exercise: Chunking and pauses

Here is the text you just listened to. Try to read it with appropriate chunking as marked.

*Does it really matter /
whether people speak with an accent /
as long as they can be easily understood?//
Many people now believe /
that in an increasingly globalised world /
we should accept variations in pronunciation /
that is / accent //
However / there's no point in speaking with an accent /
if people can't understand you / is there?//*

Exercise: Intonation

Read these two questions aloud.

Do you think the voice would generally rise or fall at the end of these questions?

- ☐ *Were you at the lecture yesterday?*
- ☐ *What was the topic?*

Intonation is the rise and fall of the voice.

In very general terms, the voice falls at the end of sentences and WH questions. It rises at the end of yes/no questions.

Exercise: Intonation

Say the following in two ways:

- 1) with a falling intonation at the end,
- 2) with a rising intonation at the end.

How does this difference in intonation convey a difference in meaning?

○ *"It's an interesting subject, isn't it?"*

Intonation is the rise and fall of the voice. As well as grammatical meaning (sentences, wh questions, yes/no questions), intonation serves other communicative purposes.

- 1) with a falling intonation in "It's an interesting subject, isn't it?", the speaker is simply stating that it is an interesting subject and seeking the listener's agreement.
- 2) with a rising intonation in "It's an interesting subject, isn't it?", the speaker is unsure about whether it's an interesting subject and asking the listener for information about whether or not it is interesting – more of a "genuine" question.

Exercise: Intonation

On the next slide listen to 5 ways to say:

- *It was interesting.*

What is the difference in meaning conveyed?

Exercise: Intonation

It was interesting

It was interesting (?)

It was interesting ...

It was interesting ...

It was interesting!



Intonation is the rise and fall of the voice. As well as grammatical meaning (sentences, wh questions, yes/no questions), intonation serves other communicative purposes.

- 1) giving information confidently – a statement
- 2) question or not sure
- 3) incomplete statement – you have something more to say
- 4) you have some doubts/ reservations
- 5) Emphasising – enthusiastic, happy, surprised or contrasting what someone else said

Exercise: Connected speech

- How would you say the question in the box below?

What do you want to do about it?

- Listen to the recording on the following slide and compare it to how you said it.

Exercise: Connected speech

Wotcha wanna do 'boutit ?

Why does this question sound like this?



Do you think it is important for you to sound like this when speaking English?

In connected speech, words are often **linked** together and **weak** forms are used. Combined with **stressing key words**, this is what gives English its rhythm.

While it not essential that students use a lot of linking and weak forms in the production of language (ie. speaking), it is very useful for students to learn about these features in order to aid their comprehension of oral language (ie. listening)

Exercise: Connected speech

1. What would be the weak form of the following words?

an..... to.....him

but..... have.....can

2. How could you link these words together?

○ *a Masters in Business Administration*

○ *I'd like to be an accountant*

○ *She's in first year*

1. The use of schwa is a feature of weak forms.

The kinds of words that often (not always) are pronounced in their weak form are:
articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, modals

2.

o

- has 2 examples of consonant to vowel linking

between words.

The /z/ sound at the end of "masters"

The /z/ sound at the end of "she's"

Discussion: Other vocal features and voice quality

- **Consider other features of pronunciation such as volume, speed and pitch. How do these impact on oral communication?**
- **How can a speaker use their voice to convey feelings (e.g. warmth, anger, distance/formality) ?**
- **Can you think of an English speaker whose voice you really like? What is it about the way they speak that appeals to you?**

Pace or speed - Speak at just the right speed, not too fast, not too slow. When you are giving a presentation, it's a good idea to vary your speed. This is something we do naturally depending on what we are talking about and how we feel about it. It's part of what gives speech vitality and interest.

Volume- Speaking too loud or too softly can be irritating to your listener and get in the way of communicating your ideas effectively. Judge the right volume for your situation. Take care when giving a presentation. The person sitting at the back of the room should be able to hear you without straining.

Pitch level- Varying your pitch level (that is, how high or low your voice is) can be an effective way of signalling a new topic when giving a presentation. In general, we jump up to a higher pitch level to signal something new or to signal that we are presenting important or major information. We tend to move to a lower pitch to indicate minor or additional information.

When giving a presentation, you do not want to speak in a monotone as you want to keep your audience's attention. Along with appropriate pausing and key word stress, it is important to vary pace, volume and pitch somewhat.

Voice quality - This term is hard to define, but we all instinctively know what it means in any language. Basically, it refers to the 'sound' of a person's voice, for example, 'smooth', 'harsh', 'abrupt', 'warm', 'cold' or 'tense'. Some people refer to it as 'tone of voice'. We are all sensitive to voice quality. For example, we can often guess how someone is

feeling when we speak to them on the phone, even if they only say the single word 'hello'. There may be something in that person's voice quality that makes you ask, 'What's wrong?' Your listeners are more likely to share your interest in what you are saying if your voice expresses your own interest.

Discussion

- Which features of pronunciation do you feel you need to work on?
- Vowel sounds
 - Consonant sounds
 - Stressing the right syllable in words
 - Stress for key words
 - Chunking and pauses
 - Intonation
 - Connected speech
 - Other vocal features, such as speed, volume, emotion

It is important that language learners reflect on their own areas of weakness in order to improve them.

Discussion

- How do you think your first language influences your English pronunciation?

L1 interference can cause pronunciation difficulties. As a result students from different language backgrounds will need to work on aspects of their pronunciation.

NEXT SLIDE: A useful reference for students is the first part in each chapter of: Swan, M. & Smith, B. (eds) 2008 *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Each chapter deals with a different language but not all languages are covered.

It is important that language learners can identify and reflect on their own areas of weakness in order to improve them.

Useful reference

Swan, M. & Smith, B. (eds) 2001, *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

This is a useful reference dealing with first language influences.
It can be found in the UTS library or as a free e-book on Google Scholar.

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It is important that language learners can identify and reflect on their own areas of weakness in order to improve them.

Practising Pronunciation Workshops 2, 3 & 4 will consist of a variety of practical activities, in which students will have the opportunity to practise all the features of pronunciation

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