

Listen to the beat: Activities for English pronunciation

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This project by Victor Yevmenov is accepted in its present form.

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Abstract

Suggested in this work is a set of activities for learners of English as a foreign language developed with a special focus on suprasegmentals of connected speech such as rhythm, stress patterning, weak forms, linking, assimilation and elision of sounds. It is designed to meet the needs of teachers of English working with groups of adult and young adult learners whose native language is syllable-timed.

Language Rhythm

Oral Language

Pronunciation

Pronunciation Instruction

Class Activities

Classroom Techniques

Resource Materials

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“I think that we can trace the first elements of the spirit of a language to the unconscious surrender of our sensitivity to what is conveyed by the background of noise in each language. This background obviously includes the silences, the pauses, the flow, the linkages of words, the duration of each breath required to utter connected chunks of the language.” (Gattegno, 1972)

Introduction

On a warm April evening of 2000, just after the completion of a Workshop on Teaching Techniques and Approaches at the International House Language Center in Kharkov, Ukraine, I was sitting in a restaurant doing my best to maintain a conversation with a Romanian friend, who was telling me about his language school. We were both leaning over the table towards one another trying hard to catch each other’s words, which was practically impossible because of the live rock band thundering a few meters away. I thought I’d never learn anything about his school that evening.

Surprisingly, however, 15 or 20 minutes later we were still talking and were somehow able to exchange information in spite of the noise. When I registered this fact, it struck me as weird. What was it that made it possible for me to decipher my friend’s utterances? All I had to build on was his facial expression, the general context, one or two words out of each phrase and the general energy distribution of his speech – the rhythm and intonation. Still, we managed to communicate. And I did learn a lot about his school that evening.

But the most exciting insight I had that evening was this: that rhythm can carry information, that it is the guide to the structure of information in the spoken message.

Unfortunately, the pronunciation syllabi of most language courses available today, including those used in my school, ignore this important aspect. Instead, they focus almost exclusively on the pronunciation of particular sounds, or stress patterns on the

word level at the best. But the ‘suprasegmentals’ of connected speech, such as segmentation, rhythm patterning, linking, assimilation and reduction of sounds, which, taken together, shape the ‘music of English’ – the unique rhythm and intonation of the language – are not given enough attention. As a result, quite a few learners who have reached the upper-intermediate level and are already capable of using sophisticated vocabulary and a variety of structures, still find it difficult to understand natural spoken English, and their own speech can still be inadequate for the level. This happens because ‘they do not learn to rely on the structural information given them by the rhythm of speech’ (Gillian Brown 1990, 47).

I subscribe to the point of view expressed by Wong (1987, 2) that ‘the goal of pronunciation teaching should be to foster communicative effectiveness’, which implies minimal intelligibility in terms of production and the ability to perceive natural spoken English in terms of reception, and that ‘rhythm and intonation are the key elements of intelligibility in speech’. I believe that intensive and systematic work on those aspects will contribute to students’ ability to produce fluent and comprehensible speech, and will be particularly useful for developing their listening ability, the ability to deal with comprehension problems caused by the blurring of word boundaries and the changing of sound quality in fluent connected speech. It will help learners to ‘build the right expectations about the kind of sound and rhythm patterns they are likely to be confronted with in normal native speech’ (Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994, 116) . The above considerations prompted my decision to write this set of activities focusing on the suprasegmentals of connected speech, rhythm patterning first and foremost.

In developing the activities I made a point that they should be universal and easily adaptable for use with any coursebook materials available, such as, for example, reading or listening texts recently used for work on vocabulary, structures, general comprehension, etc. This should make them immediately applicable to groups of any level. Also, I tried to ensure that the activities are relevant for the student population of a language school like IH-Kharkov: monolingual groups of adults and young adults speaking a syllable-timed language and learning English outside the language environment.

In developing the activities I used many suggestions from friends and colleagues – teachers in the International House schools, developed by them at the International House conferences and workshops in Kharkov, Lviv, London and Budapest. I also adapted a few activities from ideas suggested by A.Underhill (1994), C.Laroy (1995) and M.Powell (1996). I refer to the sources in commentaries to the activities.

The activities are grouped according to the focus on a particular aspect of pronunciation, although, of course, they overlap: rhythm profile activities can be extended and adapted for work on intonation, stress time activities are perfect for work on weak forms, etc. The activities can be used in any order depending on the students' needs as diagnosed by the teacher.

Chapter 1. Tuning in to the music of English

The activities in this chapter are designed to sensitize learners to the general sound, pace and rhythm of English.

□ Imitation

This activity is an invitation to your learners to take a more careful look at how native speakers of English speak their language. The tone should be light-hearted and fun. The activity was adapted from a presentation by M.Plesak of International House, Lviv at the Workshop on Teaching Techniques and Approaches in Lviv in 1998.

LEVEL: All

TIME: 20 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students overcome the fear of sounding ‘ridiculous’; to create a mental model for learners.

PREPARATION:

For Part 1: A recording of English speakers speaking the learners’ L1 with a strong accent; a recording of L1 speakers speaking English with a strong accent.

For Part 2: Choose or write two dialogues at an appropriate level for your students to act out, one in their L1, the other in English (Example: any dialogue from Headway

Postscript section or New American Streamline.)

PROCEDURE:

Part 1

1. Bring in an audio or video recording of native speakers of English speaking your students' language with a strong accent. (For Russian speaking students, Arnold Schwarzenegger as a Russian cop will do.) Choose a characteristic passage that can be imitated by your students. Prepare a transcript of the dialogue, and a translation in English.
2. Play the tape twice. The second time, encourage the learners to imitate the speakers quietly to themselves whenever they find them particularly 'amusing'.
3. Ask the students at what moments they found the pronunciation particularly funny, and encourage them to imitate the speakers. Ask if anyone can explain why they think the British/Americans pronounce the students' language in that way.
4. Hand out the text of the dialogue and ask the students, in pairs, to act out the passage from the film or tape, imitating the speakers in any way possible. Encourage the class to comment on the performance.
5. Hand out another short dialogue, the English one, and ask the class to act it out, still imagining they are the speakers they heard on the tape or in the film.

Part 2

1. Ask your class if they have ever heard British\American people speak the students' language. Ask them to describe how they sound and how one can recognize their nationality by the way they speak. Tell your learners that President Reagan used to collect Russian proverbs and was heard on many occasions saying 'Doveray, noh proveryay' (Trust, but verify) with an accent one cannot mistake. Imitate him yourself.
2. Hand out your chosen text in the learners' mother tongue. Divide students into pairs and direct them to imitate British or American people as they read the dialogue out loud.
3. The pairs discuss which person in the pair imitated the British or Americans more convincingly, and why. Ask volunteers to perform for the whole class.
4. Ask the students to sit comfortably and to close their eyes. Tell them to say something in their L1- anything they like - to themselves in a very soft voice with an English/American accent, and to listen how the sound of it resonates in their body.
5. Tell your learners that if they speak English with the accent British and American people have when they speak the learners' mother tongue, they will speak English more like British or American people. Tell them they are going to try this.
6. Hand out the text of the dialogue in English. Tell the students to read it aloud in pairs, still imitating British or American people. Ask them to read it expressively, like actors on the stage. Then ask them to change partners. Monitor, moving from pair to pair.

COMMENTARY

There likely to be some students who will find it difficult to imitate or impersonate. Those could be self-conscious teenagers who feel embarrassed, or solid serious grown ups who feel reluctant to give up their language egos. But learning a language *is* about imitating! If you have such students in your group, you can rely on the good old suggestopaedic idea of hiding behind an assumed personality: play a film director with them. You are a film director looking for a couple of good actors for your film, and they are actors, rehearsing. As a film director, you can give them a model. Don't be afraid to exaggerate a little and sound funny. Apart from everything else, this activity is a good ice-breaker.

FOLLOW UP:

Bring in an audio or video recording of speakers of your learners' L1 speaking English with a strong accent. Ask your students what they think it is that makes the speakers sound non-English. Discuss as a class.

- Three readings.

The rationale behind this activity is that it calls upon the learners' "inner criteria". They immediately realize that the robot-like and the random delivery are not exactly English because they both lack something. You lead the learners to realize that the feature those two readings lack is rhythm – a combination of stress, unstress and pauses. Lack of rhythm makes the message difficult to comprehend. One insight your learners can get

from this activity is that rhythm is the carrier of information. The activity is fun, the students are likely to laugh and giggle. It is particularly good with young learners. The principle of three readings used here was suggested by Underhill (1994).

LEVEL: All

TIME: 10 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To awaken an awareness of the stress and rhythm of English

PREPARATION:

This activity consists of three steps in one sequence requiring you only to read aloud to your class an excerpt of no more than two or three sentences. Prepare learners by asking them to listen to the *way* you speak rather than to the meaning. It is better to choose a text they have recently used.

PROCEDURE:

1. Read one or two sentences to the class in a robot-like way, without any stress at all, so that each syllable is given the same length, volume and pitch. Ask the students to discuss their observations in pairs, then get feedback as a class. Lead the discussion so as to elicit from the students the notions of stress and rhythm.

2. Read the same sentences, this time placing the stress whenever seems natural to you.
Exaggerate the stress a little if you like. Ask them what they noticed. Did some words stand out? Which ones? Why?
3. Read the same sentence again, this time with random stress placement. Ask them what they noticed this time. What are their conclusions from this?
4. Put the students in small groups. Individually they prepare a line of text by deliberately grouping the words into nonsense groups. They then take turns reading their lines aloud. The rest of the group have to listen, re-process them from their memory and pronounce the lines so that they make sense. If the learners care to, they can perform their “nonsense” versions for the whole class to re-process.

□ Walk the rhythm.

Music teachers know that the sense of rhythm is a very difficult thing to develop. In this activity, when the poem is over and the learners find themselves moving rhythmically together in complete silence, it is a very insightful moment for them. They really feel the rhythm of English inside themselves. This is an adaptation from an activity from Laroy (1995).

LEVEL: All

TIME: 15 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To develop an awareness of the pace and rhythm of English

PREPARATION:

- a) Select a piece of music good to walk to
- b) Make two recordings, one of a short, rhythmic poem or prose text in English, and one in your students' L1

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask your learners to walk around the room in pairs, with one leading, and the other trying to walk like the leader. The leaders are free to move the way they like – stopping, slowing down, speeding up. After a maximum of one minute, ask the students to swap roles. After another minute, ask the students to stop and discuss the way they felt, first in groups of four, then as a class.
2. Play the music and ask the students to walk to it. Then ask them how easy or natural it was for them to walk to the pace of the music. Ask them if they have ideas about why this was easier.
3. Play the recording of a rhythmic short poem in their L1, or read it and encourage your students to move their head, leg or arm or to sway their whole body to the rhythm of the text.
4. Play the recording or read the poem again and ask your students to walk to the rhythm of the text. Have them comment on how it felt to walk to the rhythm of the poem.

5. Repeat Step 4, but ask your students to go on walking to the rhythm after the poem has finished. Ask the students what they experienced in this part of the activity. Ask them what helped them move rhythmically after the poem finished.
6. Proceed as in Step 4 with a poem in English. Then let them express any differences they feel there are between the rhythm of English and that of their native language.

COMMENTARY

There can be some mess, never mind about that. I use walking to a poem as a filler to change the pace of the lesson and the mode of activity whenever I need it. Song lyrics are very good for it, particularly the ones my students love.

□ Step the stress.

The learners whose native language is syllable-timed (like Ukrainian or the Russian spoken in Ukraine) tend to give equal length to all syllables, whether stressed or not.

This happens because they transfer their L1 speech habits to English, which is a stress-timed language. This activity is a way to raise students awareness of the rhythm of English speech.

LEVEL: All

TIME: 15 MINUTES

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To develop awareness of the pace and rhythm of English. To raise the notion of stress.

PREPARATION:

Make a handout for each learner with a paragraph of three or four lines in English from a previously studied text.

PROCEDURE:

1. Give a handout to each learner. Ask them in groups of three to take turns reading the text aloud, and then to decide which syllables in the paragraph are stressed.
2. Tell the learners they are going to read the paragraph aloud together, in chorus, and walk around the room stepping on a stressed syllable only. Show them how to do it.
(Step on stressed syllables only; say the unstressed syllables without stepping.)
3. Give a signal for the students to start reading and moving. There will inevitably be a lot of confusion. Do not worry. Watch the learners and do not let them step on unstressed syllables. In a while, you can point out to them that if they say unstressed syllables a bit faster, it will be easier for them to walk.
4. After the learners finish reading and walking, ask them to discuss in their small groups what they felt. Then get feedback as a class. They will probably say they felt an irresistible temptation to step on unstressed syllables. Ask them why they think this happened. Is it because they perceive all syllables as equally long and equally loud? Ask the students what they felt when they stepped on stressed syllables only. Did they feel they have to say unstressed syllables a bit faster? Point out to them that English

speakers often swallow or squeeze unstressed syllables in order to fit them between stressed ones. Introduce the notion of stress-time at this point.

5. Practice using another paragraph for the learners to have fun.

COMMENTARY

When students find themselves standing with one foot in the air after a stressed syllable, while they are saying unstressed ones, they develop a physical awareness of the difference between stress and unstress.

FOLLOW UP:

Do the same with a poem in L1 and compare stress patterns.

Chapter 2 Feel the rhythm

The activities in this chapter take learners from working on strictly metrical material to working on less metrical natural conversational phrases, and further to even less metrical and longer stretches of speech. They can be used in any order depending on your students' needs.

□ Speak rhythmically

The goal of this activity is for learners to gradually develop a habit of noticing and feeling rhythmicity in everything they hear and say. It is important to make this 'noticing' a regular feature of your class so the students overcome initial embarrassment, relax and get used to the procedure. There will be some learners who might feel reluctant to clap their hands or stomp their feet. Be flexible about it and find an acceptable way to demonstrate rhythm. This activity is dynamic and fun. It doesn't need to be tied up with the other stages of the lesson, so I use it whenever I want to change pace. It has been adapted from an activity by Laroy (1995).

LEVEL: All

TIME: 15 minutes per lesson for several lessons

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES: To master English speech rhythm

PREPARATION:

- a) Choose what two-syllable words or utterances you would like to practice, for example: ‘Hello’, ‘Come on’, ‘Sit down’, ‘Who’s there?’, ‘Goodbye’, ‘behind’ (all with stress on the second syllable);
- b) Think of some examples of simple conversational phrases, for example: ‘Good morning, Mary’, ‘Hi, how are you?’, ‘I’m glad to see you’;

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask your students to compare the rhythm of English to that of other languages. They will probably say something like: ‘Italians speak very quickly’, ‘Ukrainians stress every word when they speak’, etc.
2. Tell them that one of the basic rhythmic patterns of English is a two-syllable rhythm with a weak and a strong beat. Demonstrate by saying: ‘Hello!’ and clapping your hands.
3. Ask your learners to say ‘Hello!’ and beat the rhythm with their hands at the same time. For the weakly stressed syllable they touch the ball of the thumb with the tip of their fingers, and for the strongly stressed syllable they clap their hands.
4. Ask the students to beat the same rhythm again, but without actually saying the word.
5. Make this a chain activity: you start clapping the rhythm and they follow, each in turn.

6. Practice till all your students can do this with two-syllable words and phrases, then move to step 7.
7. Tell the learners you are going to clap a simple phrase, such as 'Good morning'. Ask one student to start from this and add a word or short phrase. He or she first says the new phrase, then just claps it without saying.
8. Demonstrate:

Unspoken: (Good morning!) a A a (clapped)

Unspoken: (Good morning, Mary.) a A a A a (clapped)

Where 'a' indicates unstressed syllables, and 'A' indicates stressed ones.

9. Ask the class to clap the new phrase with the first student. When he or she is satisfied with everyone's performance, they all say the sentence aloud, and clap at the same time.
10. Ask the students whether the clapping fits the phrase. Discuss as a class.
11. The learners say the phrases and clap correctly, and then clap without speaking.
Finally, ask the first student to clap alone while the students in the group listen, thinking of the word.

VARIATIONS:

To increase the sensation of rhythm, you can ask your students to clap their hands on their thighs, or to beat their hands flat on each other's backs. Then ask the students to face each other in pairs and clap their hands against their neighbors', only touching each other's hands when there is primary stress. This is ideal for peer correction.

FOLLOW-UP #1:

Repeat this over a number of lessons, varying the phrases, until all the learners can do it.

Then they do it in groups of four, each person extending the clapped phrase or sentence in turn.

FOLLOW-UP #2:

Point at phrases on the board and ask the students to recall them, without moving, clapping, or speaking, just feeling the rhythm in themselves.

❑ Completing limericks.

The regular rhythm of a limerick is obviously not the same as the normal rhythms of spontaneous speech. But using limericks can help to give learners an awareness of the kinds of rhythmic patterns which they need to put into practice in a more dynamic way when they speak English. In particular, it can help to show how unstressed syllables are compressed into the spaces between the stresses. Limericks will be later used for work on weak forms.

LEVEL: Any, depending on the complexity of vocabulary used.

TIME: 15 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To develop awareness of rhythm, syllable reduction and rhyme.

PROCEDURE

1. Show a limerick, with one to three lines missing, on the board or on a handout given to groups of learners.
2. Ask them to suggest suitable lines to complete the limerick, and to judge the suitability of each others' suggestions, paying attention to meaning as well as pronunciation. The learners decide which versions have the correct rhyme scheme and can be said with the correct rhythm.
3. The class can then practice reciting accepted versions, tapping the rhythm as they do so.

VARIATIONS:

1. Instead of a line, leave out words or phrases.
2. The missing line need not be the last, it could be any of the lines.
3. Give a complete limerick, but with a line or phrase which doesn't fit, and which the learners must identify and replace.
4. Specify the number of words to be supplied. e.g. _ _ _ _ _
5. Specify the number of syllables to be supplied. e.g. * * * * *
6. Ask each group of learners to write limericks and swap gapped versions with other groups who then complete the incomplete versions.
7. Challenge the students to supply a line containing as many syllables as possible, while still conforming to the rhythm.

8. Divide the class into two groups. Ask one group to loudly say only stressed syllables, the other group to softly whisper only unstressed syllables in the limerick. Read in chorus. The groups swap roles. Read again. It should be great fun. Ask the students which role was more difficult, and why.

Variation #9:

Completing longer poems. For upper-intermediate and advanced learners.

Use Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* for this version. *The Three Bears* and *Little Red Riding Hood* from this book are perfect for the purpose.

PROCEDURE

1. Give out a handout with the text. Tell the students they are going to read a poem, two lines per each learner.
2. They read two lines aloud each. By the time they have done it, they will have gotten the feel of the rhythm and gotten interested in the plot.
3. The rest of the story on the handout is gapped, with a missing word at the end of each stanza. Ask the students to work in pairs and supply the missing words. They will cope with it easily, but if you think it is difficult for your learners, provide them with a jumbled list of missing words.
4. Ask the learners to get together again and check as a class, each learner in turn reading two lines, as before. The rest of the class beat the rhythm and say the missing words together. It's no problem if in some cases they have different versions. Quickly decide upon the best one and go on.

5. After the learners have read it up to the end and checked, you can ask them to read it once again – for fun and enjoyment.

❑ Talking hands

In this activity students are made to rely on rhythm patterns of utterances in order to identify them. It is fun and works particularly well with teenagers. The idea of clapping hands to relay messages was suggested by Laroy (1995). If made a regular feature of your class and repeated over a few weeks or even months, it can sharpen students' sensitivity to rhythm patterning of utterances considerably.

LEVEL: All

TIME: 10-15 minutes the first time, 5 minutes in further lessons

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To learn to recognize rhythm, internalize the rhythm of simple utterances and associate rhythm with meaning.

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell your students that in many countries of the world people communicate with drums or gongs, simply by beating the rhythm. By this means they transmit a limited number of messages over long distances. Tell your class that in English too, rhythm is

important, and that they are going to communicate like talking drums, but clapping their hands instead.

2. Make a list of simple utterances that they know, write them on the board and number them, for example, (1) *Hello* (2) *Good morning* (3) *Goodbye* (4) *How are you?*, including some expressions of praise such as (5) *Wonderful*, and (6) *Oh dear!*
Demonstrate how to clap the rhythms.
3. Tell the students you are going to clap the rhythm of one of the words or phrases and ask them to recognise which one you are clapping. Ask your students to write down the corresponding number. Check as a class. Do this with all the utterances you have chosen, until the learners can do it easily.
4. Divide the students into pairs and ask them to do the same in pairs using the same phrases.
5. Divide the class into two groups (villages or tribes) and appoint a chief for each village and a number of ‘drummers’. The rest of the class are villagers who will overhear the message. The chiefs position themselves with one of their drummers at each end of the classroom. One chief orders his ‘drummer’ to transmit a message to a relay drummer who then transmits it to another one, until the message reaches the chief at the other end of the classroom. The second chief says, ‘The chief from the other village is saying “Good morning”, for example. If this is right, the drummers and villagers clap ‘Wonderful!’ or another expression of praise. If the interpretation is wrong, they clap ‘Oh dear!’ and make a surprised or skeptical face.
6. The second chief answers the message in the same way.

VARIATION #1:

Use this technique to teach new words and phrases. Ask half of the class to clap, and the other half to pronounce the phrases.

VARIATION #2:

Beat the rhythm on desks, using the tips of the fingers for minor stress and the palms of the hands for major stress.

VARIATION #3:

Teach your students to clap their names to each other. Then ask them to get into groups according to the stress patterns of their names. Organize a competition to see if they can recognise the names.

VARIATION #4:

Ask your students to write down where they come from: 'Peter's from Kiev', etc. In small groups (4-6) they clap the messages, saying them as well. Then they clap but say nothing, and the other learners try to recognise the message.

VARIATION #5:

Continue asking your students to make sentences to clap and transmit as described above, within the context of your lessons. For example, if the topic is food, ask them to make sentences such as 'Nick likes bananas', 'Peter prefers peaches', etc., and proceed as above.

FOLLOW-UP:

When your class can do this easily, extend the same principle to intonation. This can be done by using a kazoo or humming the messages instead of clapping, which allows to show pitch movement.

❑ Stay alert and learn a poem

In this activity students learn a poem not through parrot-like repetition, but through sharp listening and attention to all aspects of pronunciation. It has been adapted from a workshop presentation by Caroline de Beer (International House, Lviv) at International House, Kharkov in 2000.

LEVEL: Elementary and above

TIME: Varies

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To develop alertness and sensitivity to all aspects of English pronunciation

PREPARATION:

Prepare a short poem suitable for the level of your students

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell the learners you are going to read a short poem once only and ask them to be alert.
2. Read the poem at a natural speed emphasising the rhythm.

3. Read a couple of lines again, leaving out the last stressed word in each line for the learners to guess and say it out loud.
4. After making sure that the students understand what is expected of them, do the same with the rest of the poem.
5. Now read the poem leaving two stressed words per line for the learners to provide.
6. Continue this process until the students are able to provide all of the stressed words. Read as many times as you feel necessary, each time providing less yourself.
7. Do the same with the unstressed words. Pay attention to rhythm, speed, linking and weak forms, or you can focus on one or two of those aspects.
8. In a very short time the students will know the poem by heart. Recite it as a class or ask volunteers to perform.

❑ Rhythm matching warmer

This warm up activity can be particularly useful for monolingual classes learning English outside the language environment.

LEVEL: Any

TIME: 5 – 7 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To switch learners over to English speaking mode at the beginning of the class, to put into circulation the target vocabulary for the lesson and to have learners internalise its rhythm patterns.

PREPARATION:

Prepare two sets of cards. On one set write a single multi-syllabic word on each card. On the other set, write the stress patterns of each of these words represented with symbols. For example, *information* would appear as aaAa, and *phonology* as aAaa. Give out three words per learner.

PROCEDURE:

1. Mix the cards in each set.
2. Give each learner two or three word cards and a corresponding number of non-matching stress symbol cards.
3. Tell the learners their task will be to find the stress symbol cards that match their word cards. This is a mingling activity, and they will need to speak to several other learners before they find their cards. They will need language such as ‘Could you say your word?’, ‘It doesn’t match’, ‘It matches all right’. When they find a matching card, they retain the word card and take the stress symbol card from the other student. The activity continues until each learner has obtained a stress symbol card for each of their word cards.
4. When all the learners have found their matching cards, check that they have the correct answers. One way of doing this is to get them to stick their pairs of cards on the board with blu-tack or other non damaging material. You can then invite the whole group to give their opinions on whether the pairs are correctly matched or not.

VARIATION:

Instead of cards with rhythm profiles on them, you can use another set of word cards, of a different color, containing words that match in their rhythm profiles with the words on the first set. For example,

set 1: 1. *birthday*, 2. *return*, 3. *immigration*, 4. *mosquito*, 5. *sentiment*;

set 2: 1. *depressing*, 2. *harbor*, 3. *disillusion*, 4. *character*, 5. *giraffe*.

COMMENTARY

This is a pretty obvious matching activity. The important thing, though, is, first, to make it a regular feature of your class so that your students develop a habit of looking at vocabulary from rhythm perspective, and second, to gradually extend it from separate words to phrases, and then further to longer chunks, for example:

Correct me if I'm wrong aAaaaA, or *correct me if I'm wrong, but...* aAaaaAa,

dreadful propensity AaaAaa, etc.

❑ Word – Phrase Match

My students are usually very surprised to see that words and whole phrases can have the same rhythm profile. It's an important revelation for them. They realize that rhythm patterns go beyond the level of word; they are more universal within the general rhythm pattern of the language. The principle of matching words and phrases which have the same stress pattern was suggested by Hamilton (2001).

LEVEL: Any

TIME: 10 - 15 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help learners internalise the rhythm profiles of the target vocabulary.

PREPARATION:

Prepare a handout with a set of useful phrases from a previously studied text, and a set of multisyllable words in a box that match the phrases in terms of rhythm profile.

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask your students to look at the phrases on their handout and listen to you reading them out loud. For example:

b. a. *It's later than that.* b. *Do you have to?* c. *I'll call you at seven.*

d. *I don't care what you think.* e. *I know what this is.*

2. Ask the students to match the phrases they heard with the words in the box that have the same rhythm patterns. For example:

exemplification; tuberculosis; intelligently; indistinguishable; immigration

3. Read the phrases again for the students to check.
4. Ask them to practice saying the phrases and words first in pairs, then as a class.

FOLLOW UP:

Ask the learners to write a dialogue in pairs, incorporating some of the vocabulary they have just practiced. Ask volunteers to perform for the whole class.

❑ Vocab revision from pron cues

LEVEL: Any

TIME: Varies

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

This is a vocabulary revision activity which works on accuracy of pronunciation.

PREPARATION:

Draw up a list of vocabulary items which you want the class to review or to recall as the basis for further work. The items could, for example, form part of a lexical set which has recently been introduced, or be associated with a story.

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask the learners to recall and write down one vocabulary item from a certain set or source for each of the following syllable/stress patterns:

A Aa aA

Aaa aAa aaA

Aaaa aAaa aaAa

If the chosen source of vocabulary was, say, a recently read story about a missing letter, examples of these patterns might be: *stamp, contents, reply, envelope, collection, redirect, fortunately, delivery, compensation.*

2. Brainstorm the necessary vocabulary items as a class and put them on the board.
3. If necessary, get the class to practice pronouncing the words.
4. Say or write on the board any other relevant vocabulary which you think is important but which the learners have not suggested. Ask them to allocate each word to its correct category.
5. Move on to any further activity you have in mind using the collected vocabulary.

VARIATION #1: Competition

Arrange a competition. Ask the learners in small groups to provide as many examples as possible for each category. It could be from a particular lexical set, or from a recently studied text.

VARIATION #2: Run-and-hit

Draw stress patterns on the board. Divide the class into two or three teams. Tell the students they are going to hear a word or a phrase. Their task is to run to the board and touch (bang their fist against) the appropriate pattern. It's fun and only takes about four or five minutes. I use it as a warmer at the beginning of my lesson.

□ “I want you, Jacquelyn!”

In this activity you work on a dialogue the way film directors do, by explaining the underlying motives and philosophy of the characters. It is important that the dialogues be humorous (Example: “I want you, Jacquelyn” from American Streamline Departures). Give your learners a model and do not be afraid to exaggerate a little. Encourage them to be dramatic in their readings.

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate

TIME: 15 – 20 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students learn to feel the rhythm of English; to internalise rhythm patterns

PREPARATION:

Choose a short taped dialogue. Prepare a transcript of the dialogue and rhythm profiles of each line (several lines) on slips of paper for each pair of students. There should be a reasonable number of slips - seven to ten - not necessarily the entire dialogue.

PROCEDURE:

1. Give out the scripts and rhythm profiles to pairs of students. Ask them to put the slips with profiles in the correct order, according to the dialogue.
2. Let the students listen to the recording of the dialogue and check. Ask them to rehearse the dialogue in pairs.
3. Put the students in groups of four. Tell them they are going to play 'Film Director': one pair says the dialogue, the other two students are film directors; they listen, give feedback and make suggestions. Then they swap roles.
4. Ask volunteers to perform for the whole class. Are any of the performances - rhythm and intonation - better than the original? Discuss as a class.

VARIATION:

1. Give out the script. Learners in pairs mark stressed, unstressed syllables. Ask them to mark intonation contours. You can show them how to do it: write a sentence on the board and draw lines above the words to show pitch movements – rises and falls.
2. Play the taped dialogue and ask the students to listen and check.
3. and 4. Play 'Film Director' and perform the dialogue as in the main procedure.
5. Ask the students to add a couple of lines to the dialogue - to give it an interesting twist.

6. Ask volunteers to perform for the whole class.

□ Quotations

Having to say the same dialogue several times might seem boring at first, but students very soon realise that their fluency and confidence improve with each repetition, and they begin to enjoy it. The language incorporated into students' speech in a meaningful situation becomes internalised very quickly. One of my students said that 'Learning a language is about imitating.'

LEVEL: Upper-intermediate, advanced

TIME: 15 – 20 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students integrate correct rhythm patterns into their spontaneous speech; to internalise useful vocabulary.

PREPARATION:

Prepare a handout with a set of quotations, proverbs or any phrases from previously studied texts that you would like your students to internalize.

PROCEDURE:

1. Give a handout to each learner. Ask the students to read through the quotations and decide which ones strike them as interesting, and why. Discuss as a class.

2. Ask the learners to mark stressed, unstressed syllables, pauses and intonation contours on the phrases and to practice saying the phrases in pairs.
3. Ask the students to compare their marked versions in pairs, then discuss as a class.
4. Take the phrases one by one and practice saying them as a chain drill.
5. Ask the students in pairs to write a short dialogue incorporating one or more quotations into it.
6. Perform new dialogues in groups of four, with two learners speaking and two other learners listening and giving feedback on performance.
7. Have each pair of students say their dialogue to two or three other pairs.
8. Get feedback from the class. Ask the learners which dialogue struck them as the most impressive.

VARIATION:

1. Give out handouts with phrases like these:

Time is a commodity whose value is beyond estimation. (Anon.)

Wine exercises a peculiar charm but, taken in excess, causes grievous harm. (Anon.)

Happiness is a thing to be practiced, like the violin. (John Lublock)

Life is about timing. (Carl Lewis)

Ask the students to think of some words they can substitute for the underlined ones.

For example: *Love (life, wine) is a commodity whose value is beyond estimation.*

2. Listen to everybody's suggestions all together.
3. Proceed as above.

Chapter 3. Sense grouping

□ Introducing sense groups: three readings

‘Three readings’ is a tool designed by A. Underhill (1994) to introduce the students to the idea of the sense group, that is to show them that some words belong together. I believe that it can be used as a universal tool to raise students’ awareness of various aspects of pronunciation. By exposing your students to wrong segmentation, then ‘zero’ segmentation (robot-like reading with no pauses), and correct segmentation (pauses in the right places) you have them develop an awareness of how important correct segmentation is for the message to be received by the listener. The point here is that the learners need to experience the three versions and then make a conscious choice between them, rather than just accept the correct version given by the teacher. The activity is fun, my students enjoy it a lot, particularly teenagers. But you shouldn’t overdo it, two or three paragraphs is enough.

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above.

TIME: 15 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To raise awareness of the correct segmentation in speech

PREPARATION:

Prepare a paragraph of text your students are not familiar with. You can choose a passage from a reading text from the next lesson in their coursebook, or a story or fairytale from their reader.

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell your students you are going to read them something in three different ways and ask them to notice the differences carefully. Read the paragraph to the class with no expression, no stress, no pauses.
2. Read the same piece of text divided into nonsense groups, with irrelevant and non-sensical pauses. Exaggerate a little bit by making longer pauses. For example:

There was/ once an old dying/ farmer. Before he/ died he wanted to teach/ his three sons to be/ good farmers. So he called/ them to him and/ said ‘My boys, before I/ die I want you to /know that there is a great/ treasure buried/ in the vineyard. Promise /me that you will/ look for it when/I am dead’ (New Headway Intermediate, OUP, 1996, unit 3, p.26)
3. Read the same piece of text, this time making use of appropriate sense groupings, with short pauses between the groups.
4. Ask the learners what differences they notice and what conclusion they draw. Discuss as a class.

FOLLOW UP:

Ask your students to individually prepare a few sentences by dividing them into nonsense chunks. Then in groups of three the students take turns reading their sentences out loud to

their partners, who have to re-process the sentence they hear and say it back in the correct way.

□ Why pause?

Learners who are not fluent and confident usually feel the pressure to speak without pausing. The above activity is designed to help them cope with this pressure and become aware that pauses are a natural and indispensable part of normal speech. On the other hand, students often stop at wrong places because they do not know the right places, or ‘feel wrong’ to them. This activity is supposed to help them develop the feel for the right places to pause. Feedback and discussion in small groups of the students reactions to each other’s pausing are essential. I adapted it from an activity suggested by Laroy (1995).

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above

TIME: 5 – 10 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students cope with pressure to speak without stopping

PREPARATION:

- a) Select texts that naturally contain sustained pauses, such as conversations and monologues. Try to find a text recorded without pauses and one with pauses, or make one on your own. For example: American Streamline Connections: unit 6, ‘Monday Morning’; unit 32, ‘Family Problem’. Headway Intermediate, unit 3, T. 23, ‘The

holiday that wasn't'; unit 4, T.26, 'Bert Atkins'; unit 7, T. 51, 'Thomas Wilson – a retired man';

- b) Prepare the transcripts of the texts you are going to use

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask your learners in groups of four to discuss what effect pauses have on speaking.
Give them five minutes.

2. Ask your learners to brainstorm the possible meanings of silences and put their suggestions on the board. They will probably come up with some of the following:

- to separate groups of words that belong together
- to avoid ambiguity
- to signal that another idea is coming
- to think about what partner has just been said
- to signal they do not know what to say any more
- to signal they want to draw attention to a particular point
- to indicate the speaker has finished a sentence
- to signal a change in topic
- to signal they are waiting for an answer or for feedback
- to indicate they want to make sure their audience is listening
- to indicate they want to give their audience time to think
- to signal that the speaker has finished speaking on the topic
- to give a surprising twist to what was said before, for example:

He is a very nice person (pause) when asleep.

3. Play the tape and ask the students to listen to the moments when the speaker *does not* actually speak, and to decide what effect the pauses have on communication. Ask them to use their suggestions in Step 2 as a checklist. Tell them they can add to the list.
4. Give out the transcript of the text your students listened to. In small groups, ask your learners to take turns reading the text incorporating pauses appropriately.
5. Ask the students choose a topic to speak on in their small groups. Ask them to prepare a short talk individually, building in natural and logical pauses to illustrate 3 – 5 items from their checklist in Step 2. Give them enough time to prepare.
6. Students take turns speaking. The rest of the small group listen to register pauses, then provide feedback on how natural and appropriate the pauses were and what effect they had on communication.

□ Provide your own rhythm

The point in this activity is that the students' work on rhythm and segmentation is based on their internal understanding and personal interpretation of the text rather than on repetition. I usually use this activity in the format of a 'Radio Play' (same as 'Film Director') to make it enjoyable and fun.

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above

TIME: 20 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students develop awareness of rhythm; to help students develop phonological fluency

PREPARATION:

Prepare a handout with a paragraph of text from your students' coursebook. Use a reading text or a script of a listening text they have not studied yet.

PROCEDURE:

1. Give out your chosen text. Ask the learners to read the first two sentences and decide where the sense groups are, dividing them with a vertical line, e.g.:

There was once/ an old dying farmer./ Before he died/ he wanted to teach his three sons/ to be good farmers. /So he called them to him/ and said /'My boys,/ before I die/I want you to know /that there is a great treasure /buried in the vineyard./ Promise me that you will look for it / when I am dead'./

(New Headway Intermediate, 1996, OUP: 26 – 27)

2. Ask your learners to decide which syllables are stressed within each sense group, and to underline them, e.g.:

There was once/ an old dying farmer./ Before he died/ he wanted to teach his three sons/ to be good farmers. /So he called them to him/ and said /'My boys,/ before I die/I want you to know /that there is a great treasure /buried in the vineyard./ Promise me that you will look for it / when I am dead'./

3. Using the same texts (already divided into sense groups), ask your students to mark reduced vowels (schwas, /i/) and linking. Then ask the learners to rehearse the first few sense groups internally and aloud, individually, trying to get a smooth flow. You monitor, providing feedback and support.
4. Ask the students to listen to each other in small groups. Tell them to compare their versions to notice and discuss all the differences they can hear.
5. Now ask them to apply steps 1 to 3 to the rest of the text so that in the end they deliver the text in their own way that reflects each person's understanding through the rhythm, the stress and the phrasing. Explain that it should not be flat mechanical reading, each reader should try to interpret the text on behalf of the listener, rather than just read the words.
6. Now you read the text aloud yourself, giving it your own interpretation while they just listen. Ask the students if they agree with your interpretation. Discuss as a class.

❑ Intensive listening

This is a very intensive and a very detailed activity, so the text should not be longer than 20 to 40 words. But it can be made very enjoyable if you keep the learners motivated. When they do Step 11 successfully, they experience great satisfaction. You can capitalize on it, because success is addictive, and gradually make this activity a (more or less) regular feature of your class. You can also encourage them to work with listening to texts in this way at home. I am very grateful to Tim Bowen and other International House, Hastings (GB) teachers who kindly shared with me the suggestions I use here.

LEVEL: Intermediate and above

TIME: 20 – 25 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help learners improve their listening skills

PREPARATION:

Prepare a short taped dialogue or monologue. It can be a listening text from your coursebook, but the more authentic it sounds the better. You can use a TV or radio news item.

PROCEDURE:

1. Play the tape once or twice, asking learners to write on the board any stressed words or syllables they can hear, in random order. Refrain from correcting mistakes at this stage; let the learners do the correcting themselves. Encourage the students to write down what they hear even if they don't know the word. They can look it up in the dictionary later.
2. Rewrite the stressed words in the correct order leaving enough space between words for the unstressed words to be written in. At this point they have already got the gist of the message and are able to discuss it.
3. Play and replay small sections of the tape while learners try to identify the unstressed words or syllables and write them in the spaces. They can write down fragments of words if that is all they can hear, perhaps giving the first letter of each word or just leaving dots for the words or syllables they fail to hear. Gradually the phonemic outline of the unstressed words emerges.

4. Once the sentence is complete you can ask, why certain words are stressed and not other ones.
5. Listen to the tape from the beginning to mark on the board other features of connected speech such as linking, assimilation and elision, as well as schwas.
6. Ask the learners to pronounce the stressed syllables only, at roughly the speed of the tape. You can conduct the class by pointing at each stress in turn with the appropriate timing. This is called 'stress-hopping'. It is as though the stresses form the stepping stones of the message and the students are practicing stepping from one stress to the next.
7. Do the same again, but play the tape quietly at the same time, so that the learners are matching their timing and speed with the tape.
8. Ask the students to read from the board, saying all the intervening unstressed syllables as well, trying to keep the stressed stepping stones the right distance apart.
9. Play the tape and ask the learners to read from the board at the same time. Their task now is to merge their voices with the tape. Ask the learners to try and match the speed of the tape, not worrying too much about the sounds, even gabbling the sounds, just to experience the speed.
10. Repeat several times and ask the learners to clarify their pronunciation, maintaining the rhythm and the contrast between stress and unstress.
11. When you feel the students are ready for it, ask them to read the passage several more times maintaining speed, and after each reading erase randomly about twenty per cent of the words from the board. After the fifth reading they will be reading fluently off an empty board!

FOLLOW UP:

Rewrite the same words in a jumble on the board, and see what other sentences the students can make from them. After what they have done, they will cope with this easily.

- ‘What do you mean to say?’

LEVEL: Upper Intermediate

TIME: 20

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students develop awareness of the meaning of pauses

PREPARATION:

Prepare two handouts, one containing pairs of sentences with pauses marked in different places, such as this:

- a. We attended the seminar on fine arts in Ukraine. (The seminar was held in Ukraine.)
b. We attended the seminar on fine arts in Ukraine. (The seminar on Ukrainian fine arts.)
- a. The colleagues who had supported him celebrated all night. (And those who hadn’t, did not celebrate.)

- b. The colleagues who had supported him celebrated all night. (All of them had, and all of them did celebrate.)
- ❑ a. Those who followed his advice immediately realized that he was right. (And those who waited a bit, did not.)
- b. Those who followed his advice immediately realized that he was right. (And those who didn't listen to him never realized that he was right.)
- ❑ a. It's time to stop asking all those questions which drive everybody mad. (So we can concentrate on asking questions which do not irritate anybody.)
- b. It's time to stop asking all those questions which drive everybody mad. (All those questions drive everybody mad, so we should stop asking them.)

The second handout contains pairs of sentences, such as this:

- a. Ignore / everything I'm telling you
Ignore everything / I'm telling you
- b. What is this thing called / love?
What / is this thing called love?

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell the students you are going to say a sentence twice. Ask them to listen and notice the difference: 'The tourists who knew about the floods took another way'. First, say it as if it had a defining relative clause, and second, as if it had a non-defining clause:

'The tourists who knew about the floods / took another way'

'The tourists / who knew about the floods / took another way'

Ask them if they noticed the difference in how you say it and in meaning. It has a different meaning depending where you pause. Elicit the difference and discuss as a class.

2. Give out handout #1. Ask the learners to mark pauses in the sentences according to the meaning explained in the parentheses. Check as a class. Practise saying the sentences in pairs.
3. Tell your students you are going to say some more sentences to them. Read the sentences from handout #2, pausing in different places for different effect. Make sure your students have fun.
4. Give out your second handout. Ask the students in pairs to write phrases, like the ones on handout #2, where one can pause in different places with different effect.
5. Ask the pairs to swap the slips with their phrases. Now ask them to write a short dialogue, incorporating the phrases they got from their partners. The learners then rehearse their dialogues in pairs making a point of pausing appropriately.
6. Ask volunteers to perform the dialogues for the whole class. Discuss with the authors of the phrases if their partners guessed the context correctly.

There is a danger of this activity developing into a discussion of or a grammar lesson on relative clauses. I believe it should not. It should be lighthearted and fun.

I use this activity as a follow up to a reading lesson so I can use the vocabulary the students are already familiar with. If you wish to give it a grammar tilt, you can give your learners a 'relative clause dictation' as a follow up where you read out sentences

containing relative clauses, either defining or non-defining, and the students have to write them down, putting in commas or not.

Chapter 4. Stress vs. unstress

□ Introducing 'schwa'

The important thing is for your students to learn to perceive the difference between the stressed and unstressed syllables before or during the early stages of production. Another important thing is that they start listening without a written version of the words, in order to avoid interference from spelling. Otherwise the learners might be tempted to pronounce all vowel letters 'properly', overstressing the unstressed syllables as a result.

LEVEL: Elementary – intermediate

TIME: 5 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students develop awareness of weak forms, 'schwa' in particular

PREPARATION :

Make a list of 15 simple two-syllable words, some with stress on the first syllable and some on the second, in random order. Make sure most words contain the 'schwa' sound.

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell your learners you are going to read out a list of words. Ask them to write 1st or 2nd depending on which syllable contains a weak vowel.

2. Read out your list. The students write '1st' or '2nd'. Divide the students into pairs to compare their versions. Read out the list again for them to check.
3. Ask them to show what the weak vowels sound like. If they don't know yet, tell them this sound is called 'schwa', and it is the most popular and widely used sound in the English language. All native speakers use it, including the Queen of England and the President of the United States. Write /A/ on the board.
4. Ask the students to give some examples of English words that contain this sound.
5. Ask them to discuss in pairs what happens to unstressed vowels in their native language. Discuss as a class. There can be a variety of opinions.

□ Counting 'schwas'

This is a short and simple but insightful activity designed to open students' eyes on how widely used this sound is. The result of the count impresses the students greatly. The look of a text with schwas instead of vowel letters doubles the effect. However, I avoid asking my students to read texts typed out this way. That would mean to make them focus on schwa, and the schwa is weak exactly because it is not given attention. Having to read such a text would create a paradoxical situation: focusing on something you are supposed to disregard. Therefore, I just use this activity to raise my students' awareness of the way English treats unstressed syllables, which is very different from the way Ukrainian and Russian do. To practice schwas, I suggest other activities, like stress-timing chants (see below), where learners need to focus on stressed syllables.

LEVEL: Any

TIME: 15

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To raise students' awareness of the importance of the 'schwa' sound

PREPARATION:

Choose a paragraph of any text from your students' coursebook. Print it out using /A/ character for every schwa sound, while the rest of the text is normally typeset.

For example:

ThA hambArgAr is thA most eatAn food in thA whole wArlD. ThA first hambArgArs wA made An sold in CAnnecticut in 1895 by An AmericAn chef called Louis Lassen. Louis called thAm hambArgArs because he wAs givAn thA recipe by sailArs frAm HambArg in GermAny. HambArgArs became A favArite in AmericA in thA early part Af thA twentieth centAry.

(New Headway Pre-Intermediate, OUP, 2000, p.88)

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask your students to count all the vowel sounds in the paragraph you chose.
2. Ask them to decide in pairs which of the sounds are pronounced as schwa.
3. Give out the handout you prepared for them. Play the tape. Discuss any discrepancies as a class.

4. Ask them to count how many of the vowel sounds are realized as schwa. There should be about one third.
5. (Optional) Ask them to print out another paragraph, substituting the schwa character on their home computer.

□ A stress-timing chant

Stresstime theory has been criticized by many authors (Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994; Faber 1986; McCarthy 1991) who claim that there is no instrumental evidence to prove that stress-beats in English occur at regular time-intervals. I do believe that they occur at *approximately* regular intervals, but, in any case, this is not the most important thing for our purposes. Much more important is the difference between stressed syllables and unstressed ones: the latter ones are shorter because they have to be squeezed in between the stressed ones and need to be pronounced faster. This point is very important for students (like mine) who speak syllable-timed languages and tend to allocate an equal amount of time to all syllables, no matter whether stressed or not. They tend to transfer their speaking habits to English, which makes their speech sub-standard and difficult to understand. If they do not develop an awareness of the stress-timed nature of English and the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables, they find it difficult to decipher natural fluent English speech because they are continually confronted with unfamiliar rhythm patterns. For this reason I include the stress-time chant in this chapter devoted to weak forms. Indeed, it is more about weak vowels than regular beat.

LEVEL: Any

TIME: 10 – 15 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To raise students' awareness of the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables in English; to raise students' awareness of the stress-timed nature of English

PREPARATION:

Prepare a handout with a stresstime chant on it, for example:

- a. Bread tea soup wine.
- b. Bread and tea and soup and wine.
- c. Some bread, some tea, some soup, some wine.
- d. Some bread and some tea and some soup and some wine.
- e. Some bread and then some tea and then some soup and then some wine.

PROCEDURE:

1. Give out handouts, ask learners to listen to you read lines a,b,c,d,e. Read them in a natural way, with regular intervals between stressed syllables. Read as many times as you think necessary for your students to become aware of the beat of the rhyme.
2. Ask the learners what lines a, b, c, d, e have in common in terms of rhythm.

Hopefully, they will say that stressed syllables are the same in all the lines, and the lines take the same ammount of time to pronounce because the intervals between the stressed syllables are approximately the same length, and because of that the

unstressed syllables in line (e) have to be pronounced quite quickly. Ask divergent questions and elicit as much as you can. Tell them they are going to practice now and try to feel the difference.

3. Say the first sentence (a) aloud and rather slowly, with emphasis on each of the four words. Invite the class to join in, perhaps clapping quietly.
4. Say sentence b at the same speed, so that it occupies the same amount of time. Insert an unstressed 'and' pronounced /An/ between each of the four beats. Invite the class to join in.
5. Say sentence (c), this time inserting unstressed *and then*, pronounced /An Den/, or once you get it up to speed /An en/, between the four main beats. Invite the class to join in.
6. Say sentence e. with the three unstressed syllables between each main word pronounced: /an Den sAm/ or /An en sAm/. Invite the class to join in.
7. Divide the class into four groups and ask each group to say a different line at the same time.
8. Point to different lines at random while the basic rhythm continues unchanged.

FOLLOW UP:

1. Write on the board:
 - a) radishes oranges lettuces cabbages
 - b) potatoes tomatoes papaya sultanas
 - c) any other set of vocabulary with a stress pattern of your choice
2. Ask your students to try saying the chant using the words from a), b), c).

This simulates for your learners the experience of rhythmical patterns containing different numbers of syllables.

VARIATION:

You can make the rhythms in this activity visual using Cuisenaire rods, following the convention where a red rod represents a stress and a white one an unstressed syllable.

1. Invite participants to come to the front and lay out red and white rods to correspond to the rhythms of the four lines of the chant.
2. Ask a learner to arrange some rods to represent a mixture of these rhythms, while the others have to find the particular combination of words that fits, and say them rhythmically.

COMMENTARY

Various activities using chants have been described by many authors (Avery and Ehrlich, 1992; Ponsonby, 1987; Underhill, 1994). I developed the activity above based on their suggestions.

❑ ‘Readability bad’

This activity simulates a real life situation whereby interlocutors only hear part of the message and have to guess the rest based on stressed syllables and overall rhythm pattern of the message. Mingling and pairwork allow for a relaxed atmosphere, students feel safe and usually have fun.

LEVEL: Upper-intermediate

TIME: 15 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students learn to rely on stressed syllables for information

PREPARATION:

Prepare a set of lines containing frequently used conversational phrases. Pick them from your students' coursebook or any other suitable source.

Use dialogues your students have already worked with. Cut up the dialogues so every slip contains one or two lines only. You need one slip per student.

Prepare a second set of slips containing the same phrases with only the stressed syllables typed and with gaps in place of unstressed syllables.

PROCEDURE:

1. Hand out the slips containing the full phrases. Ask the students to find the stressed syllables and underline them. Encourage them to pronounce the phrases to themselves quietly in order to check.
2. Hand out the second set of slips prepared by you, containing the same phrases with only stressed syllables typed and with gaps instead of unstressed syllables for the students to check.
3. Collect the slips with full sentences so the students only have the slips with gaps. Ask them to look at their slips, recall or restore the full phrase and say it quietly to themselves stressing the stressed syllables and just mumbling the unstressed ones.

4. Tell them they are going to a noisy restaurant where it is very difficult to speak. Their task will be to mingle around the class, talk to as many students as possible and say the stressed syllables on their slip with the correct rhythm, swallowing or mumbling the unstressed syllables. Their partners' task will be to restore the phrase and say it back in full correctly, using the correct rhythm.
5. Ask the students to start. Switch on the music loud enough to make communication difficult.
6. After each student has spoken to all the other students in the group, ask them to sit down in pairs and act out the dialogues they have on their slips, using the same principle: pronouncing the stressed syllables only, but speaking with the correct rhythm.

FOLLOW UP:

Ask your learners to write a dialogue together, but each learner only writing his or her lines on his or her sheet of paper. Say the dialogue in pairs using the same technique, with the music playing loudly.

VARIATIONS:

- 1.) Instead of a dialogue, use a short formal speech for this purpose. Play the tape or read the speech out sentence by sentence with the learners restoring the lines in pairs.
- 2) Same as above, but the students do it in pairs from a handout you gave them.

□ 'What was that about?'

The point in this activity is that pronunciation is done in a meaningful context; moreover, students have to create their own contexts.

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above

TIME 30 –40 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students develop awareness of weak forms of unstressed vowels, noticing them and practicing them in a meaningful context.

PREPARATION:

Prepare handouts with dialogues containing weak forms. I suggest dialogues from Mortimer (1985). In this book a ‘listen and repeat’ format is used. I suggest a more student-centered procedure. You need to print four or five dialogs on a handout eliminating bold type and light type. You can also use dialogues from your students’ coursebook. For example:

- Tomorrow we’re going to leave this place!
 - Yeah. What are you going to do first?
 - Well, I’m going to rent a big car, meet my girlfriend, and take her to an expensive restaurant. We’re going to have lobster and champagne. What about you, Fred?
 - My wife’s going to meet me outside. Then we’re going to visit her mother.
- (New American Streamline Departures, 1994, 27)

PROCEDURE:

1. Give out the handouts, one dialogue per pair of students. Ask them to read, discuss who and where the speakers are and what the context is. Then rehearse the dialogue.

2. Ask one pair to come out and perform the dialogue. The class then make suggestions as to the context, the characters and the situation. The performers agree or disagree. Discuss as a class. Ask other pairs to perform their dialogues with the rest of the class guessing the context.
3. Now tell your students that the dialogues they just read can be used as pronunciation exercises. What is the focus in each of them? Hopefully, they will come up with the correct answer. Do not hurry to help them out, let them rack their brains.
4. After the students have said the focus was weak vowels, ask them to decide upon stressed and unstressed syllables, and weak forms, in their pairs, and rehearse it a bit more, focusing on weak forms, and adding a line or two to their dialogue.
5. Now ask the students that they are going to play 'Film Director' in groups of four, with two students reading and two others listening and giving feedback on the performance, including weak forms.
6. Then swap partner pairs and dialogues and do it again, as many times as you consider practical.
7. As a class, get feedback. Ask the students whose performance they liked the best.

COMMENTARY

It is important that this activity not turn into a pronunciation exercise, although there is an overlap of focus – focus on the form and focus on meaning. It should remain a play whereby the students create their own meaning. The format of 'Film Director' allows shy students to hide behind the assumed personality, relax and enjoy the process while keeping in mind that they should speak beautifully and correctly.

Chapter 5 Connected speech simplifications

❑ Assimilation awareness

The point in this activity is to sensitize learners to changes and disappearances of sounds as a result of their environment. Learners are often unaware, for example, that the final /t/ of ‘first’ in *first light* disappears in rapid speech. If you contrast the different sounds of *first light* with the /t/ of ‘first’ pronounced clearly and then with the same sound disappearing, it might be an important insight for your learners.

As a lead in to this activity, as well as many other assimilation awareness activities, I say ‘Hello’ to my students in Russian. I say this word in a natural way. Then I transcribe the word on the board, the way it sounds in slow correct speech in isolation. Next, I ask my students whether what they just heard is exactly what is written on the board. Together we point out all the differences. It always comes as a shock to my students that in this simple and widely used word about half the sounds change or disappear in natural speech even if it is not very rapid. Compare:

/zdravstvuyte/ - /zrastse/.

LEVEL: Any, depending on the choice of vocabulary items

TIME : 10-20 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help learners develop awareness of the features of connected speech

PREPARATION:

Prepare a worksheet with tasks and examples (See Steps 1, 2, 4, 6)

PROCEDURE:

1. Give each learner a copy of this worksheet containing the following (example) questions:

In rapid speech:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------|
| 1 When is a /n/ | a /m/? |
| 2 When is a /t/ | a /p/? |
| 3 When is a /d/ | a /b/? |
| 4 When is a /s/ | a /ʃ/? |
| 5 When is a /z/ | a /s/? |
| 6 When is a /n/ | a /ŋ/? |
| 7 When is a /d/ | a /g/? |
| 8 When is a /t/ | a /k/? |

2. Give each learner a jumbled list of examples where such assimilations take place.

Examples:

ten green bottles	she was born in Boston
ten pin bowling	the right key
she has, has she?	white paper
this shirt	ten players

good boy	bit part
good girl	speed boat

3. Read aloud the list of examples. You can either read the examples in the order given in the worksheet above (for recognition purposes only), or in a jumbled order for a more demanding listening activity.

4. Ask the learners to work in pairs. Give each pair a jumbled list of further examples where the above assimilations occur. One learner reads the examples aloud and together they match the examples with the numbers above. Examples:

hot pie	this shop
bad manners	good goal
in Bolton	hot grog
does she?	ten girls

5. Class discussion. You may need to give further examples. You may also need to explain why this happens. One explanation is that the speech organs get into position for the following sound and thus the first sound may take on some of the characteristics of the following sound. For example, in *good morning*, the lips may be closed during 'good' in anticipation of the following /m/, causing the /d/ sound to resemble /b/.
6. Ask the learners to listen to what happens to the final /t/ sound of the first word in the following examples:

first time last chance first light
 next week best team ghost train
 dust sheet worst type just one

7. Production. Ask learners to practice saying the examples. Emphasize the element of speed, i.e. the final /t/ disappears in *rapid* speech.

FOLLOW UP #1:

1. Ask your learners in pairs to compose a meaningful and natural sounding sentence incorporating 3, 4, 5 or as many as they can of the above examples. Ask them to rehearse speaking rapidly.
2. Ask the students to say their phrase for the class. The rest of the class listen and register all the assimilations they can. Discuss as a class.

FOLLOW UP #2:

Set a competition. Choose a time limit and ask the students in pairs to come up with as many examples of the above assimilations as they can. If this is too difficult, I ask my students to find the examples in a recently studied dialogue.

Note: This activity and the next one, Connected speech dictation, have been adapted from suggestions from Tim Bowen of International House, Hastings (GB), at International House Directors' of Studies conference in Budapest in 1997.

❑ Connected speech dictation

Learners of English, even advanced ones, are often not aware of all the processes of simplification in connected speech, including elision, assimilation, vowel reduction and the creation of weak forms. This is particularly true about learners (as, in my experience, many computer programmers) who started learning English through reading rather than speaking or listening.

Of course it is unusual to give these words their connected speech forms when they are spoken in isolation. But the point is that this is a way of forcing learners' awareness of this aspect of English pronunciation.

It is important to point out to the students, however, that the kinds of pronunciations exemplified in the activity are not obligatory. For the learners, the most important thing is that an awareness of these features will help them to be able to interpret informal spoken English. Whether or not they want to use these features in their own speech is a matter of personal preference.

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above

TIME: 10 –20 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To sensitise learners to assimilation and elision; to help students notice changes in the pronunciation of some words in connected speech

PREPARATION

Make a list of phrases which illustrate simplifications in connected speech. Choose your own, including those which your learners pronounce in an unnatural, hypercorrect way.

For example:

Good bye /d/ becomes /b/

good grief /d/ becomes /g/

Do you have to go? 'have' becomes /hæf/

rock and roll 'and' becomes /n/

Do you want some? 'do you' becomes /dj±/ or /dʒ±/

Can you help me? 'can' becomes /k±n/ or /kn/

a pint of bitter 'of' becomes /±v/ or /±/

Is he there? 'he' becomes /i/

Shall we go? 'Shall we' becomes /ʃwi/

PROCEDURE

1. Tell the class you are going to dictate some words to them. Ask them to prepare by putting numbers from one to nine (or however many items you are going to dictate) down the left-hand side of the page.
2. For each item, dictate only the word illustrating the connected speech feature, twice, to give them a good chance to hear. Tell them these are normal English words, and they should use normal spelling. From our sample list above, you dictate only:

/gʊb/, /gʊg/, /hæf/, /n/, /dj±/, /k±n/, /±v/, /i/, /ʃwi/.

3. Ask the class to compare with each other what they have written.

4. Now tell them you are going to dictate short phrases and sentences, each of which contains one of the items dictated earlier. They should write these down the right-hand side of the paper so that each phrase or sentence is on the same line as the item it contains.
5. Now dictate the complete phrases/sentences, making sure the pronunciation of the originally-dictated word stays the same as before.
6. Again, get learners to compare answers with each other.
7. Ask them to comment on what they have heard and what they have written.

❑ Simplifications in the stream of speech

Comparing two (or more) levels of assimilation seems quite an obvious thing to do. It is very important, however, to refrain from just ‘telling them about simplifications’. Rather, simply lead the learners to notice and draw conclusions from their own experience. You don't even need to look for instant results. Let them move at their own pace.

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above

TIME: 15 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To have the learners notice fluent speech simplifications themselves

PREPARATION:

Prepare a short taped text, dialogue or monologue. You can use a coursebook text your students have already worked with for comprehension, structures or vocabulary

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell your students that you are going to play a taped sentence and ask them to write it on the board. Allow the students to use their dictionaries and let them play the tape as many times as they need.
2. Ask the learners to listen again and mark in the stressed syllables.
3. Now ask them to write the dictionary pronunciation of each word in phonemic script. Allow the students to use dictionaries.
4. Ask the learners to practise saying the sentence a few times in dictionary pronunciation, that is, saying each word in its isolated form. It will sound quite unnatural. Ask the students to listen to the tape again and compare what they have just been practicing with what they can actually hear on the tape. Draw their attention to any simplifications they do not notice.
5. Ask the learners to pronounce what they actually hear on the tape. When the students agree among each other, they write in phonemic script the phrase they actually hear on the board below the dictionary pronunciation.
6. At this point you can guide the learners to notice any remaining discrepancies between the transcription and the tape. Encourage them to invent their own marks and symbols to indicate anything that they can not put in phonemic script.
7. Ask the students to practise the fluent articulation of the taped sentence, using the board transcription as a guide. Let them finish by speaking the sentence while the tape plays.

8. As a class, discuss the differences between the Step 3 and Step 5 transcriptions in terms of assimilation, elision, vowel reduction and linking. Ask them to practise the two pronunciations a few times.

VARIATION #1:

You can begin by analyzing the Step 5 fluent version, and then go on to Step 3 dictionary version.

VARIATION #2:

1. Write the sentence on the board. Ask the students in pairs to arrive at the fluent version of the phrase and practice saying it.
2. Now play the tape and ask the students to notice the differences between what they hear and their version.

FOLLOW UP:

Ask the learners to find examples of similar assimilations in their L1. Discuss as a class.

- Listen in on it

The most valuable thing about this activity is the moment of revelation the students experience when they realize that what they pronounce can be interpreted in a different way. This realization comes when they suddenly get a meaningful reply to the phrase that might seem meaningless to them. Some students will immediately decipher what those statements mean, but not all of them, in my experience.

LEVEL: Intermediate

TIME: 20 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help learners develop sensitivity to blurred word boundaries and connected speech simplifications

PREPARATION:

Make a list of statements, numbered, containing some distortions which are the result of connected speech simplifications, and a list of replies, marked by letters. For example:

1. *Alaska if she wants to come with us.*
2. *I can pose music for TV programs.*
3. *The office has changed into civilian clothes.*
4. *Did you see the way to go? He was at the next table a minute ago.*
5. *In this newspaper, the TV guide is on the sent a page.*
6. *I picture book off the floor.*
7. *Will you ever for give me?*
8. *This map shows all the citizen railways in the country.*
9. *Spy does are not really insects you know.*
10. *Coke and Pepsi arrival companies.*

- a. *Who changed into civilian clothes?*
- b. *Yes, I saw him go into the kitchen.*
- c. *You'll ask who?*
- d. *Really? It used to be on the back page.*
- e. *I didn't know you were a composer.*
- f. *Only if you promise never to do it again.*
- g. *They look like insects to me!*
- h. *Oh, thanks! I didn't realize I'd dropped it.*
- i. *Do you think so? I think they work together myself.*
- j. *It doesn't show the smaller places, then?*

Color code the lists, e.g. print statements on green paper and replies on pink paper. Cut both lists up. Also, prepare a handout containing both random lists, like in the example above.

PROCEDURE:

1. Give out one green slip and one pink to each student. Tell them they are going to try and find a matching reply (pink slip) for each statement (green slip). They are going to do it by mingling around the room and speaking to other students until they find their matching reply. Tell them they will have to speak only, not read each other's slips. Before they start, ask them to practice saying the green phrase to themselves quite quickly, even if it does not make sense to them.
2. Ask the learners to start mingling. Each has to say the phrase on the green slip pretty quickly. He/she says it as many times as necessary, and the other one has to say his/her reply on the pink slip. Together they decide if the reply matches the phrase. If both students decide that it does, the replying student keeps both matching slips. Then the students swap roles and see if their other slips match. The learners go on mingling until all the slips are matched.
3. The students end up having a pair of matching slips. Ask them to sit down. Give a handout with the full list of phrases and the full list of replies to each pair of students. By this time, they have heard all or almost all the phrases, and matched two. In pairs, they match the rest of them using their handout, as a matter of checking. Together they discuss if what they see on the green slips is what they heard from their partners, and how similar or different it is. Ask the learners to practice saying all the phrases on

the handout pretty fast and discuss if they really could be spelled the way they were on the green slips.

4. Ask the students to look through a recently studied text and find examples of phrases which in fluent speech could be misinterpreted (or misspelled) in a similar way.

Check as a class. These phrases can be further used for an activity like this.

□ “Mice pies”

In this activity the students will undoubtedly come up with the idea that the context should make it clear which combination is used. This is definitely true. Other things that can help distinguish the word combinations are articulatory features such as shortening or lengthening of vowel sounds on either side of the juncture, degree of syllable stress, articulation of consonants. In context, sentence stress would make it easier still. I deliberately dictate these word combinations out of context, because the point in this activity is for students to develop an awareness and an alertness to blurred word boundaries and the juncture that can be interpreted in two different ways, as well as an alertness to sound combinations they are likely to be exposed to in fluent speech. I developed this activity from a teacher development seminar by P.Marsdale of International House, London, which he gave on his affiliation visit to IH Kharkov in 1998.

LEVEL: Intermediate and above

TIME: 20 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To help students develop sensitivity to juncture and word linking; to help them learn to discern blurred word boundaries.

PREPARATION:

Make a handout containing pairs of word combinations like these:

mice pies	my spies
gray tapes	great apes
send them aid	send the maid
car pit	carpet
it's an aim	it's a name
grade 'A'	gray day
ice cream	I scream
the way to cut it	the waiter cut it
ice train	eye strain
I'm 'A'	I may

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell your learners they are going to write a spelling dictation. Read out word combinations in the left hand column, or in the right hand column, or one member of each pair from either column randomly.
2. Ask the students to compare in pairs what they have written. They are likely to have some differences. Let them discuss in pairs whose version is correct and why they think so.

3. Give out your handout. Ask your students in pairs to take turns reading the pairs of word combinations. Can they distinguish between them? How?
4. Now ask the students to make a list of five or six combinations taken randomly from the right hand column or the left hand one. In pairs, let them take turns dictating their lists to each other, then check if they got it right. Tell the learners they can add new word combinations.
5. Discuss as a class what makes it possible to distinguish between the pairs of word combinations.

FOLLOW UP #1:

Since the pairs of word combinations used in this activity rhyme with each other, it is only natural to ask the students to compose a short poem, just a verse.

□ “Ee kista sista”

I usually play ‘Film Director’ with my students when I ask them to act out a dialogue, and they usually have fun. It should be done in a light hearted manner: you are not teaching them to speak incorrectly, rather they are learning to hear natural fluent speech. The idea of re-writing a dialogue in this peculiar way was suggested by Wong (1987).

LEVEL: Upper-intermediate and advanced

TIME: 15 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To sensitise learners to fluent speech assimilations; to help them develop listening skills

PREPARATION:

Prepare a handout with a dialogue written in alphabetic script, but reflecting fluent speech simplifications as much as possible, like this:

1.

- Lobuddy
- Hi. Hayaduin?
- Predegud, habetyu?
- Jesfahn. Seen John?
- Jespouk toum. Wez Mary?
- Apikcha fromda station.
- Ishicumin widas?
- Adunno. Alaska

2.

- Agara askew boutis mista. Ee kista?
- Ee kista sista.

- Telum anawanasium anymore!

Headway dialogues from Postscript section and most Streamline dialogues can easily be processed in this way. I also use video tapes of well known films, 'Pulp Fiction' for example.

PROCEDURE:

1. Give out the handouts. Ask your students to try and figure out what the speakers said, and re-write it correctly.
 2. Ask the learners to compare what they have got. Read out quite fast, for them to check.
- Discuss as a class and eliminate any problems.

3. Ask the students to rehearse the dialog in pairs. Volunteers act it out for the class.

FOLLOW UP:

Play or read another dialogue. Ask the learners in pairs to ‘process’ it for their partners in the same way. The students then discuss how well their versions reflect what they heard.

Chapter 6. Suggestions for learners' independent work

If students wish to achieve correct pronunciation, it is imperative that they (especially if they are adults) at some point assume responsibility for their own improvement. It is the teacher's task to help students gain confidence in the idea that achieving correct pronunciation is an attainable goal, though one which is, at least partly, their own responsibility.

The activities in this chapter are designed to equip students with some techniques students can use to continue their work on pronunciation outside the classroom, thus developing their self-reliance and independence of the teacher.

Please, note that the instructions in PREPARATION and PROCEDURE sections in this chapter are for learners.

□ Reflecting on communication experiences (auto-action research)

In our mother tongue we do a lot of guessing without even registering it, and it does not cause communication breakdowns, most of the time. My students claim that they only hear 100% of what is said in *the most ideal situations*, and have to do differing amounts of guessing in the rest of them. Becoming aware of this fact and reflecting on it might help a lot in relieving the anxiety to hear every single word when listening to English, thus enhancing learners' ambiguity tolerance. In Step 3 the learners will most probably mention

each of the items, which is good because the point is to develop their alertness and sensitivity to general energy distribution rather than reliance on hearing every word.

LEVEL: Any

TIME: 20 –30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To enhance learners' tolerance of ambiguity; to develop an awareness of their own strategies for dealing with ambiguity in their mother tongue

PREPARATION:

Make a copy of the checklist below

PROCEDURE:

Give your students the following directions, asking them to begin that same evening:

1. After you have returned home, reflect on the communication experiences you have had during the day. Try to recall if you have been in a situation of:
 - a. one-to-one conversation in a quiet place
 - b. casual exchange in a public place or on the street
 - c. telephone conversation
 - d. group discussion
 - e. listening to a speaker talking to a large audience
 - f. listening to the announcer at the airport, railway station, etc.
 - g. listening to\watching TV news report

- h. watching a film
 - i. listening to a song (solo, group, choir)
 - j. other
2. Choose one situation you remember very well (or just take them one by one), think back to it and try to recall whether you heard perfectly well every word, 100% of what was said/communicated to you. If 'yes', go back to Step 1 and take another situation. If 'no', estimate what percentage of the communication you failed to perceive, and move on to Step 3.
 3. Try to recall what exactly helped you cope with the situation of 'incomplete reception'. What was the clue you relied on to guess or restore the part you failed to hear? Was it:
 - a. general context
 - b. collocation
 - c. body language, facial expression, lip movement
 - d. stress pattern, general rhythm profile and intonation contour of the utterance
 - e. other
 4. Do this same cycle of reflection for a week (or two) and keep record of your responses and percentages. Then sum up the statistics and calculate the percentage for each item. What you have as a result is your personal 'ambiguity handling' profile.

FOLLOW UP:

A natural follow up activity to this action research is 'Readability bad' from Chapter 4.

□ Echoing

It is very motivating to be able to speak along with the tape and merge your voice with that of the speaker. It is important, therefore, that the task be doable and that the text be pretty understandable. That is why I suggest using coursebook cassettes for this activity, although, of course, any taped text can be used by more advanced students. In my

experience, some students find it quite difficult to read from the script fully marked for connected speech phenomena. In this activity the marking and the script is

only used for checking and consolidation. I find using checklists for self-monitoring and self-correction very productive.

LEVEL: Intermediate

TIME: 20 – 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To work on all aspects of pronunciation through self-monitoring and self-correction

PREPARATION :

Tell your students to choose a listening text on their coursebook cassette – either classroom or student’s cassette – with script. It should be a piece of natural conversational English, preferably monolog. It can be a text you have used for other purposes.

PROCEDURE:

1. Play a short section of the tape, one sentence or less.
2. Stay silent for a second or two to let the sounds sink in, then replay the section internally, without speaking.
3. Rewind and replay the same section of the tape.
4. Repeat step 2 and 3.
5. Now say what you just heard in exactly the same way and at the same speed. Do this a few times.
6. Replay the tape and try to evaluate your own performance by identifying discrepancies between the tape and your version. Use the checklist to check for:
 - a. stressed syllables
 - b. unstressed syllables including ‘schwa’
 - c. linking
 - d. segmentation and pauses
 - e. sentence stress
 - f. rhythm profile
 - g. intonation contours.
7. Now rewind and play the same section again, and speak along with the voice on the tape at the same speed so that your speech merges with the recording. Imitate the speaker as closely as you can. Repeat until you feel you have done your best for the moment. Just for fun, try to say the section faster than the speaker.
8. Move on to the next section of the tape and repeat steps 1 – 7.

9. Go back to the beginning of the tape and 'echo' sections one and two.
10. Add further sections and repeat the procedure as long as you feel motivated.
11. Take the script of the recording. Read it and mark the connected speech phenomena on it, relying on your memory (use checklist from step 6).
12. Listen to the tape once again to check.

□ Playing with the controls

The learners might have to experiment with their tape recorder controls before they find the right position. But when they do, the effect is striking. They immediately see that the rhythm skeleton of an utterance really exists, it is a material thing, and they can disclose it in any recorded utterance. They also see that stress is not just an abstract psychological notion, but rather a material physical combination of pitch, volume and energy.

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above

TIME: 20 –30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To discover rhythmic profile of utterances; to practice stress patterns; to develop awareness of the material nature of stress/unstress

PREPARATION:

You need a taped text and a tape-recorder that has tone controls, bass and treble. You can use any listening text from your coursebook; you only need one or two paragraphs.

PROCEDURE:

1. Turn the treble off, the bass up and the volume almost off. Play the tape; you will hear nothing.
2. Rewind the tape and play it after turning the volume slightly up. Turn the volume up, just a little bit at a time, to a point where the recording becomes audible. First, only stressed syllables will become audible.
3. Rewind the tape, play it again marking stressed syllables on a sheet of paper with ticks and leaving the appropriate amount of space between them to represent unheard unstressed syllables.
4. Turn the volume control slightly up and play the tape again. Repeat, turning the volume up again. When the unstressed syllables become audible, mark them with dots on your sheet of paper. You will end up having a complete rhythm profile of the whole passage.
5. Listen to the tape again, looking at the rhythm profile and tapping the rhythm with your fingers.

FOLLOW UP:

Turn the volume down again to a point where you can only hear stressed syllables. Try 'echoing' technique now; play the tape and speak along with the speaker. You will have to fill the gaps between the stressed syllables from your memory.

VARIATION #1:

Same as above, but instead of ticks write down the stressed syllables you hear, then use them as props for the ‘echoing’ technique.

VARIATION #2: Piecemeal dictation:

After you have written the stressed syllables, turn the volume up gradually and write the unstressed ones in the gaps. You can then mark the intonation contours by drawing lines over the words to show pitch rises and falls, and then use the ‘echoing’ technique.

□ Lip reading from TV/video

This activity helps develop the learners’ alertness and sensitivity to articulation and facial movements, as well as body language, as clues to the meaning of utterances.

If a VCR is available, the same can be done with a video excerpt. For example, you can use the trial scene from ‘Scent of a Woman’ with Robert De Niro. ‘Ann of Green Gables’ is full of suitable episodes. It is important to choose a video suitable to the students’ level so the task is doable.

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above

TIME: 10 minutes or more

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To build awareness of articulation, lip movement, facial expression and body language as a clue to stress and rhythm structure

PREPARATION:

If available, use a VCR. Record a news report from TV. If a VCR is not available, use a news channel on TV. News reports are typically broadcast regularly during the day with the same topics and the same wording. BBC World is perfect for the purpose because of very clear, albeit slightly unnatural, articulation and lip movement.

Use one short news item.

PROCEDURE:

1. Play the excerpt with the sound off. Watch the lip movements of the speaker.
2. Watch again with the sound off. Try to imitate the lip movements and the body language of the speaker. Establish stresses and pauses, if possible.
3. Try to guess what the speaker is saying.
4. Replay and mouth the excerpt as many times as you feel necessary.
5. Replay the excerpt with sound to establish what is being said.
6. The next time you listen to the report, 'echo' the speaker imitating his or her lip movements and body language.

❑ Sound scripting on your PC

Learners enjoy playing with their PCs. My students very often print out their compositions in fancy fonts using all sorts of effects. This activity is another way of raising their

awareness of connected speech phenomena by making them visible and tangible. It is based on the principle suggested by Powell (1996).

LEVEL: Pre-intermediate and above

TIME: Varies

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To develop presentation techniques; to raise awareness of stress, rhythm, prominence, pausing, segmentation through their visual representation

PREPARATION:

On your PC type out a passage of 6 – 10 lines, without paragraphing and without indentation. It can be a speech or a news report. You can use the text from your coursebook. For example:

‘We are in an energy crisis and we will have to do something quickly. Fossil fuels (coal, gas, oil) are rapidly running out. The tragedy is that fossil fuels are far too valuable to waste on the production of electricity. Just think of all the things you can make from oil! If we don’t start conserving these things now, it will be too late.’
(American Streamline Destinations, 1979)

Having the tape of the text is advisable but not necessary.

PROCEDURE:

1. Read the text aloud from the screen once. Is it difficult to read the text printed like this?
2. Now think where you would like to pause. Press ENTER for each pause.
3. Read the text once again. Does it sound the same or different? Is it easier to read now?

4. Now, decide which words are stressed. Change them into **bold**.
5. Print the heavily stressed words, those which carry sentence stress (particularly at the end of each chunk), in CAPITALS.
6. Now space out the words which you feel should be pronounced slowly, for effect.
7. Practice reading the 'sound scripted' text.
8. If you have the tape, play it and notice any discrepancies between your interpretation and the speaker's.

FOLLOW UP:

Write a short speech or toast. Type it out on your PC. 'Sound script' it using the above procedure. Practice reading the 'sound scripted' version. Deliver the speech and enjoy the process.

VARIATION:

You can start with listening to the tape a couple of times, and then 'sound script' the text on your screen. Then, listen again to follow and check.

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