

New Ways in

Teaching Speaking

SECOND EDITION

Julie Vorholt, Editor





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Sounds Like the Real Mobile Me

Stephen J. Hall

Levels	<i>High beginner to advanced</i>
Aims	<i>Develop pronunciation awareness and reflection</i>
Class Time	<i>1 hour (or less)</i>
Preparation Time	<i>None</i>
Resources	<i>Students' smartphones</i>

Many students may not realize that they do not sound like they hear themselves, as we hear through our skulls and not just through external sounds. A cell phone can provide a recording that can be replayed, shared, paused, and reflected on. Listening to oneself can help us become aware of our own pronunciation and raise awareness of any challenges to being understood by others. Playing back a recording can provide for reflection and also input from peers, which some students find less threatening than teacher feedback. The teacher can then facilitate segmental and suprasegmental awareness through a framework for critical listening and follow up by teaching techniques to address pronunciation needs.

PROCEDURE

1. Check that all students have downloaded a voice recorder app, if it is not already a phone feature.
2. Ask all students to test the recorder using the same phrase, such as, "I am now recording my beautiful voice and listening to sounds and to how my voice rises and falls," or some other short phrase. Have students play it back to themselves to check for volume.
3. Depending on the ability of students, either provide preparation time for cue cards, get them to record at home, or let them record impromptu speaking on a general topic that interests them. Selecting the topic can be very motivating for students. Talking about oneself usually diminishes thinking time, is motivating, and as a favourite topic often promotes greater fluency.
4. For recording, seat students as far apart from each other as possible. Advocate for normal speaking volume. Ask them to record a 2-minute talk on either a given topic or an open topic.
5. Get students to play back their own recording to themselves. They can note down any sounds that are difficult for them. They can also note any words that they emphasised. This can be referred to later in the activity and used for reflection.

6. Pair students. If it is possible, pair with students from another first language group. Play back each recording in pairs in a close huddle. The listener should note any words that seem difficult to understand. Spelling is irrelevant. They should also note any words they hear that seem to be important. This helps raise awareness of increased volume (stress), which is often used to increase attention.
7. The speaker can then discuss with the listener. He or she can clarify any challenging sounds or words using the written form if need be. The speaker should then say which words he or she wanted to highlight. The speaker could take note of discussed sounds, words, and tone. Then, discuss the overall feeling about what is said. Then, the students swap roles.
8. Move around, noting sound or segmental difficulties. Also be aware of stress usage or any gaps between students' intentions with intonation and their performance.
9. The framework of sound or phoneme level challenges can be addressed through techniques drawing on what has been heard, but without naming any individuals. Intonation focus on more than individual sounds can be followed up in a later lesson. The focus on either individual phonemes or suprasegmentals can then be driven by real needs, which the students can refer to through the recording.
10. Follow up and comparative work between earlier and later recording provides a record for teachers and students showing progress or areas of need.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. Some students may prefer to prepare the recording at their own leisure. This provides for a more structured presentation and may motivate practice. Underlining or highlighting keywords on cue cards may assist the use of stress.
2. Students of the same first language may not hear impediments to understanding that listeners from other language groups perceive. There can be first-language accommodation to the known marked pronunciation. However, recording provides data on first-language interference that students may not be aware of—until hearing themselves.
3. Students can record a 2-minute talk and leave it on a web-based site for your feedback. The method can increase the students' comfort level. International comprehensibility is the target.
4. The activity can be focused on just problem sounds or on the wider intonation patterns across an utterance, with a focus on emphasising keywords and rise and fall patterns. This is useful for speakers of tonal languages who need to decrease stress on the less significant words.
5. Speaking and reflecting on how we speak creates a noisy, interactive classroom, so whole class attention signaling needs to be clear.