

TEACHING SPEAKING

Questions for Reflection

- What are some of the major issues and concepts in pedagogical research that are related to teaching speaking?
- What might make speaking *difficult* for students?
- How can spoken language be classified into microskills, macroskills, and types of classroom speaking performance?
- What are some principles to follow in designing speaking tasks and activities?
- When should teachers treat spoken errors and when should they be ignored, and what are some possibilities in between?
- What are some basic principles and formats for assessing speaking?

In communicative language courses, listening and speaking skills are closely intertwined, often combined as “Oral Communication Skills” or “Listening/Speaking.” The interaction between these two modes of performance applies especially strongly to conversation, the most popular discourse category in L2 curricula. And in the classroom even relatively unidirectional types of spoken language input (e.g., speeches, lectures) are usually followed or preceded by various forms of oral production on the part of students.

Some of the components of teaching spoken language were covered in Chapter 15 as we looked closely at teaching listening comprehension: *types* of spoken language, *idiosyncrasies* of spoken language that can be difficult, and *microskills* that are also a factor of oral language. This chapter will build on those considerations as we investigate the teaching of oral communication (OC) skills.

ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH

A review of some of the current issues in teaching OC will help to provide some perspective on the more practical considerations that follow in this chapter.

Conversational Discourse

When someone asks you “Do you speak English?” they usually mean, “Can you carry on a *conversation* reasonably competently?” The benchmark of successful language acquisition is almost always the demonstration of an ability to accomplish pragmatic goals through interactive discourse with other speakers of the

language. And yet, as Richards (2008b) noted, the conversation class is something of an enigma in language teaching. The goals and the techniques for teaching conversation are extremely diverse, depending on the student, teacher, and overall context of the class. Historically, “conversation” classes have ranged from quasi-communicative drilling to free, open, and sometimes agenda-free discussions among students.

Pedagogical research on teaching conversation has provided some parameters for developing objectives and techniques (McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2010; Lazaraton, 2014). We have learned to differentiate between transactional and interactional conversation. We have discovered techniques for teaching students conversation rules for topic nomination, maintaining a conversation, turn-taking, interruption, and termination. Our pedagogical storehouse has equipped us with ways to teach sociolinguistic appropriateness, styles of speech, non-verbal communication, and conversational routines (such as “Well, I’ve gotta go now.” “Great weather today, huh?” “Haven’t I met you somewhere before?”). Within all these foci, the phonological, lexical, and syntactic properties of language can be attended to either directly or indirectly.

Teaching Pronunciation

There has been some controversy over the role of pronunciation work in a communicative, interactive course of study (Levis, 2005; Setter & Jenkins, 2005; Tarone, 2005; Lane, 2010; Murphy, 2013; Goodwin, 2014). Because the overwhelming majority of adult learners will never acquire an accent-free command of a foreign language, should a language program that emphasizes whole language, meaningful contexts, and automaticity of production focus on these tiny phonological details of language? The answer is “yes,” but in a different way from what was perceived to be essential a few decades ago. This topic will be taken up later in the chapter.

Accuracy and Fluency

An issue that pervades all of language performance centers on the distinction between accuracy and fluency (Bailey, 2003; Bohlke, 2014; Lazaraton, 2014). In spoken language the question we face as teachers is: How shall we prioritize the two clearly important speaker goals of *accurate* (clear, articulate, grammatically and phonologically correct) language and *fluent* (flowing, natural) language?

In the mid to late 1970s, egged on by a somewhat short-lived anti-grammar approach, some teachers turned away from accuracy issues in favor of providing a plethora of “natural” language activity in their classrooms. The argument was that adult SLA should simulate the child’s L1 learning processes and become the locus of meaningful language involvement (at the expense of focus on forms). Unfortunately, such classrooms so strongly emphasized the importance of fluency—with a de-emphasis on grammar and phonology—that many students managed to produce fairly fluent but barely comprehensible language. Something was lacking.

It's now very clear that fluency and accuracy are both important goals to pursue in CLT and/or TBLT (Lazaraton, 2014). While fluency may in many communicative language courses be an *initial* goal in language teaching, accuracy is achieved to some extent by allowing students to focus on the elements of phonology, grammar, morphosyntax, and discourse in their spoken output. If you were learning to play tennis instead of a second language, this same philosophy would initially get you out on the tennis court to feel what it's like to hold a racquet, hit the ball, serve it, and then have you focus more cognitively on certain fundamentals. Fluency is probably best achieved by allowing the "stream" of speech to "flow"; then, as some of this speech spills over beyond comprehensibility, the "riverbanks" of instruction on some details of phonology, grammar, or discourse can channel the speech on a more purposeful course.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

In your experience learning and/or teaching an L2, what are some of the tasks and activities that may promote the "river" of production to flow? And what are some of the "riverbanks" that a teacher can include to focus on forms (phonology, grammar, discourse) that may need containment, to avoid a "flood" of incomprehensibility?

The fluency/accuracy issue often boils down to the extent to which our techniques should be message oriented (or, as some call it, teaching language *use*) as opposed to language oriented (also known as teaching language *usage*). Current approaches to language teaching lean strongly toward message orientation, with language usage offering a supporting but important role.

Complexity

A related issue that has garnered some attention recently is the extent to which L2 tasks can be graded by **complexity** (Ellis, 2009; Skehan, 2009). Both grammatical and lexical complexity must be taken into account, but the task design itself may fall into a range of cognitive, strategic, and interpersonal complexity. The extent to which a task involves pre- and within-task *planning* has been found to be a major contributor to complexity, and subsequently to both fluency and accuracy of learners' oral production (Skehan, 2009). Complexity also varies according to cognitive operations, abstract thinking, quantity of information, negotiation of meaning, and time pressure, among other factors (Ellis, 2009), all of which could account for accuracy, fluency, and successful completion of a task.

Affective Factors

“It's better to keep your mouth closed and have others think you are ignorant than to open it and remove all doubt.”—Mark Twain

Ah yes, but Mark Twain wasn't talking about language classes! One of the major obstacles learners have to overcome in learning to speak is the anxiety generated over the risks of blurting things out that sound ignorant, embarrassing, or incomprehensible. Because of our language *identity* (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007) that informs others that “you are what you speak,” learners tend to be reluctant to put themselves in the situation of being judged by hearers. Language learners must put a new twist on Mark Twain's quip. Our job as teachers is to provide the kind of warm, embracing climate that encourages students to speak, however halting or tentative their attempts may be.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

In what way have your teachers in L2 classes promoted an affective climate that encouraged (or discouraged) oral participation? What are some “dos” and “don'ts” for teachers in setting an embracing atmosphere in the classroom? If a student says something that might make other students laugh, how can a teacher help them to laugh *with* the other student, as opposed to laughing *at* him or her?

The Interaction Effect

The greatest difficulty that learners encounter in attempts to speak is not the multiplicity of sounds, words, phrases, and discourse forms that characterize any language, but rather the interactive nature of most communication. Conversations are collaborative as participants engage in a process of negotiation of meaning. So, for the learner, the matter of what to say—a tremendous task, to be sure—is often eclipsed by conventions of how to say things, when to speak, and other discourse constraints. For example, among the many possible grammatical sentences that a learner could produce in response to a comment, how does that learner make a choice?

Tarone (2005) and Oxford (2011) both noted a crucial role for communication strategies in learning to participate in conversational discourse. A few such strategies are discussed later in this chapter. Nunan (1991b, p. 47) noted yet another complication in interactive discourse: what he calls the interlocutor effect, or the difficulty of a speaking task as gauged by the skills of one's interlocutor. In other words, one learner's performance is always colored by that of the person (interlocutor) with whom he or she is talking.

Intelligibility

A now outdated model of English language teaching assumed that intelligibility should be gauged by whether nonnative speakers are intelligible to native speakers. This “rather arrogant” (Setter & Jenkins, 2005, p. 5) premise has now evolved into much more complex questions, especially because, statistically, most

interactions among English speakers are among *nonnative* speakers. So, materials, technology, and teacher education programs are being challenged to grapple with the issue of intelligibility, and to adopt new standards of “correctness” and new attitudes toward “accent” in order to meet current global realities (Levis, 2005; Derwing & Munro, 2005; McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2010; Lazaraton, 2014).

Corpus-Based Data on Spoken Language

The intelligibility issue has been revolutionized by a growth of readily available **corpora** of spoken language (McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2004), one of the key developments in research on teaching oral production. As the size and scope of corpora expand, so our understanding of what people *really* say is informed by empirical evidence. An increasing stockpile of data on *spoken* grammar (as opposed to *written* grammar) has been instrumental in guiding L2 curricula and textbooks and in exposing learners to greater authenticity (Mumford, 2008; McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2010).

Of special interest to teachers of English worldwide is the wider range of language varieties that are now available through such projects as the International Corpus of English, which contains data from the spoken Englishes of Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, the UK, Nigeria, the Caribbean, and others. These data are spurring the language teaching profession—especially textbook and course developers—to adopt new models that transcend the traditional native-speaker/nonnative-speaker dichotomy. Our notions of what is correct, acceptable, or appropriate, both phonologically and grammatically, are changing.

Genres of Spoken Language

Finally, research on spoken language has recently attended to a specification of differences among various genres of oral production, and how to teach those variations (Hughes, 2002; Tardy, 2013). What is judged to be acceptable and/or correct varies by contexts, or genres, such as small talk, discussion, and narrative, among others. As research more accurately describes the constraints of such genres on spoken language, we will be better able to pinpoint models of appropriateness for students’ specific purposes in learning English.

TYPES OF SPOKEN LANGUAGE

In Chapter 15, several categories were defined for understanding types of spoken language, including monologue versus dialogue, planned versus spontaneous, and interpersonal versus transactional. In beginning through intermediate levels of proficiency, most of the efforts of students in oral production come in the form of conversation, or dialogue. As you plan and implement techniques in your interactive classroom, make sure your students can deal with both interpersonal (sometimes referred to as interactional) and transactional dialogue and that they are able to converse with a total stranger as well as someone with whom they are quite familiar.

WHAT MAKES SPEAKING DIFFICULT?

In Chapter 15 we also outlined some idiosyncrasies of spoken language that make listening skills somewhat difficult to acquire. These same characteristics must be taken into account in the productive generation of speech, but with a slight twist in that the learner is now the producer. Bear in mind that the following characteristics of spoken language can make oral performance easy as well as, in some cases, difficult.

Factors Contributing to Difficulty of Speaking Tasks

1. Clustering

Fluent speech is phrasal, not word by word. Learners can organize their output both cognitively and physically (in breath groups) through clustering.

2. Redundancy

Learners can capitalize on redundancy, a feature of spoken language that allows a speaker to make meaning clearer.

3. Reduced forms

Contractions, elisions, reduced vowels, and other similar characteristics all pose special problems in teaching spoken English (see the section below on Teaching Pronunciation). Students who don't learn colloquial contractions can sometimes develop a stilted, bookish quality of speaking that in turn stigmatizes them.

4. Performance variables

One of the advantages of spoken language is that the process of thinking as you speak allows you to manifest a certain number of performance hesitations, pauses, backtracking, and corrections. Learners can actually be taught how to pause and hesitate. For example, in English our "thinking time" is not silent; we insert certain "fillers" such as *uh*, *um*, *well*, *you know*, *I mean*, or *like*. One of the most salient differences between native and nonnative speakers of a language is in their hesitation phenomena.

5. Colloquial language

Make sure your students are reasonably well acquainted with the words, idioms, and phrases of colloquial language and that they get practice in producing these forms.

6. Rate of delivery

Another salient characteristic of fluency is rate of delivery. One of your tasks in teaching spoken English is to help learners achieve an acceptable speed along with other attributes of fluency.

7. Stress, rhythm, and intonation

This is the most important characteristic of English pronunciation, as will be explained below. The stress-timed rhythm of spoken English and its intonation patterns convey important messages.

8. Complexity

The complexity of grammatical and discourse structures is an obvious source of difficulty, but *task* complexity can also be a feature that teachers should consider. Tasks that are multidimensional or that have interdependencies may themselves be challenging regardless of linguistic features (Robinson, 2001; Ellis, 2009; Skehan, 2009; Kim & Payant, in press).

9. Interaction

As noted in the previous section, learning to produce strings of language in a vacuum—without interlocutors—would deny spoken language its richest component: the creativity of conversational negotiation.

MICRO- AND MACROSKILLS OF ORAL COMMUNICATION

In Chapter 15, micro- and macroskills for listening comprehension (adapted from Richards, 1983) were presented. Here, many of the same skills apply, but because of major cognitive and physical differences between listening and speaking, some noticeable alterations have been made, as illustrated in the box on page 352.

One implication of such a list is the importance of focusing on both the forms and the functions of language. In teaching OC, we should not *limit* students' attention to the whole picture, even though that whole picture is important. We can also help students to see the pieces—right down to the small parts—of language that make up the whole. Just as you would instruct a novice artist in composition, the effect of color hues, shading, and brush stroke techniques, so language students need to be shown the *details* of how to convey and negotiate the ever-elusive meanings of language.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

What is the difference between the *micro* and *macro* skills listed below? Which skills would more likely be treated in beginning levels of L2 courses? Which ones in advanced levels? How do the first ten microskills build on the last six macroskills?

Micro- and Macroskills of Oral Communication

Microskills

1. Produce chunks of language of different lengths.
2. Orally produce differences among the English phonemes and allophonic variants.
3. Produce English stress patterns, words in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, and intonational contours.
4. Produce reduced forms of words and phrases.
5. Use an adequate number of lexical units (words) in order to accomplish pragmatic purposes.
6. Produce fluent speech at different rates of delivery.
7. Monitor your own oral production and use various strategic devices—pauses, fillers, self-corrections, backtracking—to enhance the clarity of the message.
8. Use grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization), word order, patterns, rules, and elliptical forms.
9. Produce speech in natural constituents—in appropriate phrases, pause groups, breath groups, and sentences.
10. Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms.

Macroskills

11. Use cohesive devices in spoken discourse.
12. Accomplish appropriately communicative functions according to situations, participants, and goals.
13. Use appropriate registers, implicature, pragmatic conventions, and other sociolinguistic features in face-to-face conversations.
14. Convey links and connections between events and communicate such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification.
15. Use facial features, kinesics, body language, and other nonverbal cues along with verbal language to convey meanings.
16. Develop and use a battery of speaking strategies, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, providing a context for interpreting the meaning of words, appealing for help, and accurately assessing how well your interlocutor is understanding you.

TYPES OF CLASSROOM SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

In Chapter 15, six types of listening performance were listed. With the obvious connection between listening and speaking, six similar categories apply to the kinds of oral production that students are expected to carry out in the classroom.

1. Imitative

A very limited portion of classroom speaking time may legitimately be spent generating rehearsed, imitative speech, where, for example, learners practice an intonation contour or try to pinpoint a certain vowel sound. Imitation of this kind is carried out not for the purpose of meaningful interaction, but for focusing on some particular element of language form.

Is *drilling* a legitimate part of the communicative language classroom? The answer is a qualified “yes.” Drills offer students an opportunity to listen and to orally repeat certain strings of language that may pose some linguistic difficulty—either phonological or grammatical. Drills are to language teaching what the pitching machine is to baseball. They offer limited practice through repetition. They allow one to focus on one element of language in a controlled activity. They can help to establish certain psychomotor patterns (to “loosen the tongue”) and to associate selected grammatical forms with their appropriate context. Here are some useful guidelines:



GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL DRILLS

- Keep them short (a few minutes of a class hour only).
- Keep them simple (preferably just one point at a time).
- Keep them quick-paced and “snappy.”
- Make sure students know why they are doing the drill.
- Limit them to phonological, morphological, or syntactic points.
- Make sure they ultimately lead to communicative goals.
- Don’t overuse them.

2. Intensive

Intensive speaking goes one step beyond imitative to include any speaking performance that is designed to practice some phonological or grammatical aspect of language. Intensive speaking can be self-initiated or it can even form part of some pair work activity, where learners are “going over” certain forms of language.

3. Responsive

A good deal of student speech in the classroom is responsive: short replies to teacher- or student-initiated questions or comments. These replies

are usually sufficient and do not extend into dialogues (categories 4 and 5). Such speech can be meaningful and authentic:

T: How are you today?

S: Pretty good, thanks; and you?

T: What is the main idea in this essay?

S: The United Nations should have more authority.

S1: So, what did you write for question number one?

S2: Well, I wasn't sure, so I left it blank.

4. Transactional (Dialogue)

Transactional language, carried out for the purpose of conveying or exchanging specific information, is an extended form of responsive language. Conversations, for example, may have more of a negotiative nature to them than does responsive speech:

T: What is the main idea in this essay?

S: The United Nations should have more authority.

T: More authority than what?

S: Than it does right now.

T: What do you mean?

S: Well, for example, the UN should have the power to force a country to destroy its nuclear weapons.

T: You don't think the UN has that power now?

S: I don't think so. Some countries are still manufacturing nuclear bombs.

Such conversations could readily be part of group work activity as well.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

In conversations such as the one above, how do language users *negotiate* meaning? What conversation strategies were used to negotiate meaning? How effective was the teacher in encouraging the student to clarify or expand ideas? What, if anything, would you have done differently if you were the teacher?

5. Interpersonal (Dialogue)

The other form of conversation mentioned in Chapter 15 was *interpersonal dialogue*, carried out more for the purpose of maintaining social relationships than for the transmission of facts and information. These

conversations are a little trickier for learners because they can involve some or all of the following factors:

Characteristics of Interpersonal Conversation

- a casual register
- colloquial language
- emotionally charged language
- slang
- ellipsis
- sarcasm
- hidden meanings that require understanding “between the lines”

For example:

Amy: Hi, Bob, how’s it going?

Bob: Oh, so-so.

Amy: Not a great weekend, huh?

Bob: Well, far be it from me to criticize, but I’m pretty miffed about last week.

Amy: What are you talking about?

Bob: I think you know perfectly well what I’m talking about.

Amy: Oh, that . . . How come you get so bent out of shape over something like that?

Bob: Well, whose fault was it, huh?

Amy: Oh, wow, this is great. Wonderful. Back to square one. For crying out loud, Bob, I thought we’d settled this before. Well, what more can I say?

Learners would need to learn how such features as the relationship between interlocutors, casual style, and sarcasm are coded linguistically in this conversation.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

In the above conversation between Amy and Bob, what are some examples of the seven characteristics of interpersonal conversation listed? The last three—ellipsis, sarcasm, and hidden meaning—are often difficult for learners to discern. How would you go about teaching learners, first, to comprehend these elements, and then to produce them in authentic conversation?

6. Extensive (Monologue)

Finally, students at intermediate to advanced levels are sometimes asked to give extended monologues in the form of oral reports, summaries, or perhaps short speeches. Here the register is more formal and deliberative. These monologues can be planned or impromptu.

PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS

Let's look at some of the foundational principles that should guide your teaching of OC skills.

1. Focus on Both *Fluency* and *Accuracy*, Depending on Your Objective

In our current zeal for interactive language teaching, we can easily slip into a pattern of providing zesty, content-based, interactive activities that don't capitalize on grammatical pointers or pronunciation tips. We need to bear in mind a spectrum of learner needs, from language-based focus on accuracy to message-based focus on interaction, meaning, and fluency. When you do a jigsaw group technique, play a game, or discuss solutions to the environmental crisis, make sure that your tasks have a linguistic (language-based) objective, and seize the opportunity to help students to perceive and use the building blocks of language. At the same time, don't bore your students with lifeless, repetitious drills. As noted above, make any drilling you do as meaningful as possible.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Let's say you're leading your students in a task (in small groups) that involves locating buildings on a map and giving directions on how to go from point "A" to point "B". What might be some *language-based* objectives in such a task? How would you make sure your students pursue those objectives? Consider pre-task preparation, and then what would you do *while* students are performing the task, and how might you assess their success?

2. Ascertain That the *Complexity* of Your Techniques Is Appropriate

As we noted above, speaking tasks can range from very simple to extremely complex, depending on linguistic, cognitive, and task-design elements. As you design and carry out techniques, put yourself into the shoes of your learners, ascertaining that the complexity of task is appropriate for your learners' proficiency levels. Sometimes activities may be linguistically simple, for example, but involve task complexity that causes undue difficulty.

3. Provide Techniques That Spark the *Interest* of Students

Try at all times to appeal to students' interests, daily lives outside the classroom, cultural habits, and to what is of genuine relevance to them, and ultimately to continuing their language learning journey. Even in those techniques that don't send students into ecstasy, help them to see how the activity will benefit them. Often students don't know why we ask them to do certain tasks and activities. It doesn't hurt to tell them, as in, "This task will help to be able to order from an online store."

4. Encourage the Use of *Authentic* Language in *Meaningful* Contexts

This theme has been played time and again in this book, but one more reminder shouldn't hurt! It is not easy to keep coming up with meaningful interaction. It's easy to succumb to the temptation to do disconnected grammar exercises when we go around the room calling on students one by one to pick the right answer. It takes energy and creativity to devise authentic contexts and meaningful interaction, but with the help of a storehouse of teacher resource material (see recommended books and articles at the end of this chapter) it can be done. Even drills can be structured to provide a sense of authenticity.

5. Provide Appropriate *Feedback*

In most "foreign" language situations, students are totally dependent on the teacher for useful linguistic feedback. In the context of L2 learning within an L2 speaking culture, they may get such feedback "out there" beyond the classroom, but even then you are in a position to be of great benefit. It is important that you take advantage of your knowledge of the L2 to inject the kinds of feedback that are appropriate for the moment, and that will help students to *notice* elements of language that need work.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

How likely is it that in natural conversations outside the classroom, an L1 hearer will actually correct an L2 speaker's mistakes? Unless speech is totally incomprehensible—which might elicit a "What?" from the hearer—corrective feedback is unlikely. How might a teacher encourage students to *solicit* corrective feedback outside the classroom? What kinds of discourse devices could L2 learners use in that solicitation, without becoming annoying?

6. Capitalize on the Natural *Link* Between Speaking and Listening

Many interactive techniques that involve speaking will also, of course, include listening. Don't lose out on opportunities to integrate these two skills. As you are perhaps focusing on speaking goals, listening goals may naturally

coincide, and the two skills can reinforce each other. Skills in producing language are often initiated through comprehension.

7. Give Students Opportunities to *Initiate* Oral Communication

A good deal of typical classroom interaction is characterized by teacher initiation of language. We ask questions, give directions, and provide information, and students have been conditioned only to “speak when spoken to.” Part of OC competence is the ability to initiate conversations, to nominate topics, to ask questions, to control conversations, and to change the subject. As you design and use speaking techniques, ask yourself if you have allowed students to initiate language.

8. Encourage the Development of Speaking *Strategies*

The concept of strategic competence (see *PLLT*, Chapters 5 and 8) is one that few beginning language students are aware of. They simply have not thought about developing their own personal strategies for accomplishing oral communicative purposes. Your classroom can be one in which students become aware of, and have a chance to practice, such strategies as the following:



ORAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO TEACH L2 LEARNERS

- asking for clarification (*What?*)
- asking someone to repeat something (*Hub? Excuse me?*)
- using fillers (*Uh, I mean, Well*) in order to gain time to process
- using conversation maintenance cues (*Uh huh, Right, Yeah, Okay, Hm*)
- getting someone’s attention (*Hey, Say, So*)
- using paraphrases for structures one can’t produce
- appealing for assistance from the interlocutor (to get a word or phrase, for example)
- using formulaic expressions (at the survival stage) (*How much does _____ cost? How do you get to the _____ ?*)
- using mime and nonverbal expressions to convey meaning

TEACHING CONVERSATION

Research on teaching conversational skills (Tarone, 2005; McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2010; Lazaraton, 2014) historically describes two major approaches for teaching conversation. The first is an *indirect* approach in which learners are more or less set loose to engage in interaction. The second is a *direct* approach that “involves

planning a conversation program around the specific microskills, strategies, and processes that are involved in fluent conversation” (Richards 1990, pp. 76–77).

The indirect approach implies that one does not actually *teach* conversation, but rather that students acquire conversational competence, peripherally, by engaging in meaningful tasks. A direct approach explicitly calls students’ attention to conversational rules, conventions, and strategies.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

In L2 classes that you have taken or taught, have you noticed, in groups or pairs, that students are talking a *lot*, with plenty of give-and-take and no loss for words? When that happens, to what extent is that discourse focused on some specific microskill or grammatical or discourse feature? Is it purposeful to have such stretches of *fluent* conversation with no formal focus? If so, what are those purposes?

While both approaches can be found in language-teaching institutions around the world, recent developments in such models as task-based language teaching (TBLT) have taken the learner well beyond simply using language. Research on SLA strongly suggests the inclusion focus on form, including analysis and practice, as an integral part of every task (Nunan, 2004; Loewen, 2011; Sheen & Ellis, 2011; Spada, 2011). Likewise, Skehan (1998a, p. 131) recommended that communicative tasks “maximize the chances of a focus on form through attentional manipulation.” It is clear, upon scanning current English language textbooks, that the prevailing approach to teaching conversation includes the learner’s inductive involvement in meaningful tasks as well as consciousness-raising elements of focus on form.

What are some the specific elements of conversation implied in the current research on teaching conversation? We have adapted a list of features from Richards (1990, pp. 79–80) to create the following possible goals:



POTENTIAL GOALS TO INCORPORATE INTO CONVERSATION TASKS

- conversing for both transactional and interactional purposes
- producing both short and long turns in conversation
- encouraging strategies for managing turn-taking in conversation
- teaching strategies for opening and closing conversations
- initiating, developing, maintaining, and responding to a range of topics

- using casual, neutral, and formal styles of speaking
- using conversation in different social settings and social encounters
- developing strategies for repairing trouble spots in conversation, including communication breakdowns and comprehension problems
- maintaining fluency in conversation through avoiding excessive pausing, breakdowns, and errors of grammar or pronunciation
- using conversational fillers and small talk
- using conversational routines

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

If you were teaching students to “use conversation in different social settings and social encounters,” what are some of those settings and encounters? How does a telephone conversation, for example, differ from face-to-face conversation in a social setting, such as at a party, lunching with a friend, or striking up a conversation with a stranger?

What follows on pages 361–368 are some sample tasks and activities from textbooks that illustrate teaching various aspects of conversation.

- The first (Figure 16.1) is an activity for beginners, and involves conversation about daily schedules, using the simple present tense.
- The second excerpt (Figure 16.2), for an intermediate level, gets students to give advice (imperatives) about things they should try.
- The third example (Figure 16.3) is also for an intermediate level, giving students an opportunity to request information about clothing and to place an order.
- The fourth lesson excerpt (Figure 16.4) is for advanced students, a role play that raises awareness of communication styles.

Figure 16.1 Describe Your Schedule (Saslow, & Ascher, 2006, pp. 70–71). Reprinted by permission.

2

Describe Your Schedule

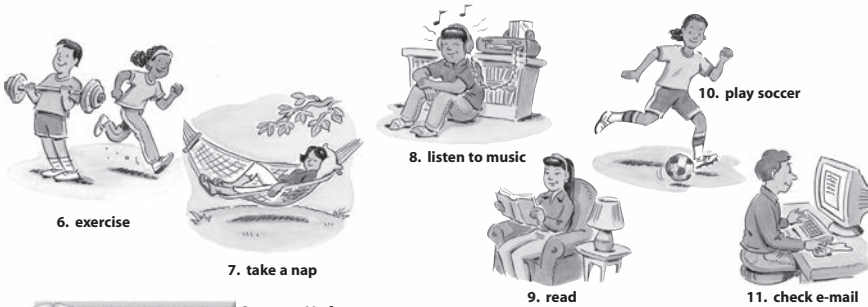
LESSON

A **VOCABULARY.** Household chores and leisure activities. Listen and practice.

Household chores



Leisure activities



VOCABULARY BOOSTER See page V5 for more.

B **LISTENING COMPREHENSION.** Listen to the conversations about household chores. Circle the correct choice.

1. Marie _____.
 - a. cleans the apartment
 - b. washes the dishes
2. Paul _____.
 - a. takes out the garbage
 - b. washes the dishes
3. Sue's brother _____.
 - a. takes out the garbage
 - b. does the laundry
4. Jen's husband _____.
 - a. washes the dishes
 - b. takes out the garbage

C **GRAMMAR.** The simple present tense: habitual activities

Use the simple present tense for habitual activities.

She checks her e-mail every day.

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

He goes shopping on Saturdays.

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					✓	
						✓

Other time expressions

- once a week
- twice a week
- three times a week

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
		✓				
			✓	✓		
			✓	✓	✓	

SP-TN-FUND-U08 Final 3/8/05 1:51 PM Page 71
 Figure 16.1 Describe Your Schedule (Continued)

D PAIR WORK. Ask your partner the questions. Add your own questions. Then write about your partner.

- When do you do the laundry?
- What do you do on the weekend?
- When does your family go shopping for food?
- When do you watch TV?



Alex does the laundry on Sundays.

CONVERSATION • Describe your schedule.

1. MODEL. Read and listen.

Andy: What's your typical week like?
Sasha: Well, on Mondays and Wednesdays I go to school.
Andy: And what about the other days?
Sasha: On Tuesdays and Thursdays I work.
Andy: Sounds like you're pretty busy.
Sasha: Yes, I am. What about you?
Andy: I work every weekday. On the weekend I exercise and go to the movies.

2. Rhythm and intonation practice

3. PAIR WORK. Write your typical weekly activities on the schedule. Then discuss your weekly schedules. Start like this:

A: What's your typical week like?
B: Well, _____.
A: And what about _____?
B: _____.

Continue in your own way ...

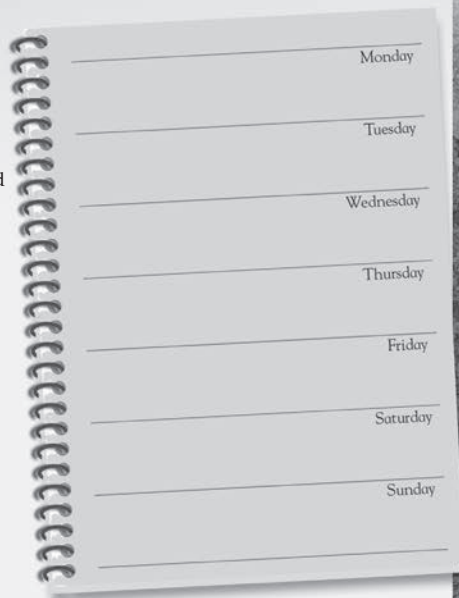













Figure 16.2 How do you stay healthy? (Helgeson, Brown, & Wiltshier, 2010, pp. 28–30). Reprinted by permission.

unit 3
How do you stay healthy?







PREVIEW


Healthy and unhealthy actions

1 Listen. Point to the pictures.




1-15


GOOD HEALTH




do yoga




eat fruit and vegetables




lift weights




laugh




meditate




apologize




forgive



exercise



relax




walk


BAD HEALTH




get angry




smoke




eat fatty foods



drink alcohol



worry



work (too hard)

2 Add 2 more words to each group.

3 Work with a partner. Which good things do you do? Bad things?
Example: A: *I walk a lot.*
B: *That's good. Not me. I eat a lot of fatty foods. How about you?*

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Figure 16.2 How do you stay healthy? (Continued)

LISTENINGunit 3

Your best advice

TARGET Listening for general understanding: health topics

1 Listen. Match the people to their ideas. There is 1 extra idea picture.

1
Jade
B

2
TaeWoo
F

3
Rosa
E

4
Anthony
A

5
Yuri
C

A
learn to relax

B
exercise

C
laugh

D
don't eat fatty foods

E
walk

F
eat fruit and vegetables

TARGET Listening for specific information: health routines

2 Listen again. Complete the sentences.

1. Exercise at least 3 times a week.

2. Eat a lot of fruit and vegetables. Eat every color.

3. Walk. Don't always take a car or a bus.

4. Learn to relax. Try yoga or meditation.

5. Laugh. Babies laugh 300 times a day. Adults only laugh 7 times.

3

2-minute Conversation Task

- Close your book.
- Have a conversation. English only.
- Introduce yourself.

Talk about what you do to stay healthy.

Figure 16.3 Ordering from a catalog (Brown, New Vistas 2, 1999, pp. 131–132)

Information Gap Activity

Student A

You are a telephone salesperson for the Best Wear Company. Your partner is a customer. Your partner calls to order some items from your company’s catalog. Take the order and fill out the order form. Make sure you have written the order correctly by asking your partner to confirm it. Don’t look at your partner’s page!

Ordered by:

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____
 Telephone _____

Ship to: (Use only if different from “ORDERED BY”)

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____

Item number	Quantity	Color	Size	Description	Unit price	Total

Method of Payment

- store account credit card
 check debit card

Merchandise Total	_____
Shipping and Handling	_____
Total	_____

Useful Language

Answering the telephone:

Hello, Best Wear Company.

Asking for information:

What’s the item number (or price)?

What color (or size) would you like?

Confirming the order:

Did you say the item number

(or price or color or size) was . . . ?

Ending the conversation:

Thank you for your order. Good-bye.

Figure 16.3 Ordering from a catalog (Continued)

Information Gap Activity

Student B

You want to place a catalog order. Your partner is a telephone salesperson. Look at the catalog page below. Choose two items you want to buy. Call the Best Wear Company and give your order to your partner. Make sure that your partner takes the order correctly by confirming the information. Don't look at your partner's page!

40% OFF ALL SLEEPWEAR FOR BOYS

#1234X Boys' FLANNEL PAJAMAS
 Sizes: S, M, L, XL.
 Colors: Red, Blue, Green
 Reg. \$25, Sale \$14.95



ALL WATCHES ARE ON SALE!
\$29.99 each

WATER-RESISTANT SPORTS WATCHES
 SHOWN:
 A. # 7875P EXPLORER
 B. # 7876Q GOLDMAN
 C. # 7877F DECATHLON
 Reg. \$39.99, Sale \$29.99



SAVE ON GIRLS' JEANS \$19.99

#0017G GIRLS' HIGH MOUNTAIN JEANS
 Slim & Regular Sizes 7-16.
 Colors: Blue, Brown, Black
 Reg. \$30, Sale \$19.99



EVERY SWEATER FOR HER IS ON SALE! \$29.99

#2323W COTTON/ACRYLIC SWEATERS
 Sizes: S, M, L.
 Colors: Black, Red, Green, Blue
 Reg. \$45, Sale \$29.99



SAVE ON GIFTS FOR MEN \$24.95

#1185D CLASSIC SUEDE SLIPPERS
 Sizes: 7/8-12/13.
 Reg. \$40, Sale \$24.95



25%-40% OFF ALL WOMENS' HANDBAGS!

A. #4440H VINYL TOTE
 Black only. Reg. \$14, Sale \$10.99
 B. #4445B PATCHED LEATHER BAG
 Colors: Black, Brown. Reg. \$40, Sale \$24.99
 C. #4447B DENIM BACKPACK
 Blue only. Reg. \$20, Sale \$14.99



Useful Language

Starting the conversation: Hello. I'd like to place an order.
Placing an order: I'd like . . .
Confirming the order: Yes, I said the item number (price or color or size) is . . .

2 Compare your responses in small groups. Discuss the following questions.

- Which of your responses were similar to the responses of other group members?
- Which of your responses were different?
- Did any of your classmates' responses surprise you? Why?

Figure 16.4 Direct and indirect communication styles (Dale, 2013, pp. 87–88)

II. Direct and Indirect Communication Styles

In some cultures, people are very direct. They usually tell others exactly how they think or feel about a situation. People from the United States, Canada, Australia, England, Israel, and Germany tend to communicate very directly. In contrast, people from countries like Japan, China, Korea, Thailand, and Mexico often communicate indirectly. They worry about hurting people's feelings if they disagree or show they are unhappy about a situation. They often avoid direct eye contact with their listeners.

ACTIVITY 1 Role-play Direct and Indirect Communication Styles**1 Work with a partner. Choose one of the following situations to role-play.**

- You want to get to know a classmate. You would like to invite him or her for a cup of coffee after class.
- You have been working for the same company for two years for the same salary. You work very hard. You would like to ask your boss to give you a raise.
- Your friend borrowed a book from you and hasn't given it back. You need the book to study. You would like your friend to return your book.
- You just got married. You are shopping for furniture with your spouse. You think the furniture your spouse likes is ugly. You would like to buy different furniture.
- Your teacher made a mistake grading your exam. She gave you a B instead of a B+. You would like her to correct her mistake.
- You just had a wonderful lunch in a café with your boyfriend or girlfriend. The waiter brings your bill and has charged you too much for your lunch. You would like the waiter to correct the mistake before you pay.

2 Write a simple dialog about the situation you chose. Think of the words and body language you might use if you have an *indirect* communication style.**EXAMPLE:**

Situation: You bought a new portable radio that didn't work properly. You bring it back to the store and show it to the salesman who sold it to you. Your conversation goes like this:

You: I am so sorry to bother you.

Salesman: How can I help you?

You: [*looking down at the floor*] I just bought this radio and it doesn't work.

Salesman: Oh, that's too bad.

You: Isn't there something you can do about this? [*still looking down at the floor*]

Salesman: No, I'm sorry.

You: Thank you anyway. [*You leave the store with the broken radio.*]

3 Now write a dialog about the situation in which you use a *direct* communication style.**EXAMPLE:**

You: [*looking directly at the salesman*] Excuse me. I just bought this radio and it doesn't work.

Salesman: Oh, that's too bad.

You: [*still looking directly at the salesman*] I would like a refund, please.

Salesman: I'm sorry, we don't give refunds.

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Figure 16.4 Direct and indirect communication styles (Continued)

You: Then I would like to speak to the manager, please. Would you call him?
Manager: What seems to be the problem here?
You: I just bought this radio and it doesn't work. Here is my receipt. I would like a refund, please.
Manager: Of course, I will take care of this for you.
You: Thank you very much.

4 Act out (role-play) your situation in front of the class twice. First use the indirect communication style. Then use the direct one.

5 After all the role plays, discuss the following questions in small groups:

- a. Which communication style are you more comfortable with—direct or indirect?
- b. Which style is used most often in your culture?
- c. How would people from your culture handle the situations in Activity 1?

ACTIVITY 2 Interpret Behaviors

1 Misunderstandings happen when we don't understand why people from different cultures act the way they do. Look at the student behaviors in the chart. List possible reasons why the person is behaving that way. The first item is completed as an example.

Student Behavior	Possible Reasons
1. doesn't look at other people when speaking	-it is rude in the student's culture -student lacks confidence -student is dishonest -student dislikes person she is speaking to
2. constantly apologizes	
3. shrugs shoulders when asked questions	
4. always sits away from everyone else	
5. usually sits way in the back of the classroom	
6. says "yes" to everything	
7. gives opinions without being asked	
8. never gives opinions, even when asked	
9. asks lots of questions	
10. acts embarrassed when called on by the teacher	
11. does not participate in class discussions	

2 Work in small groups. Share the reasons you listed for each behavior in the chart. Then discuss these questions:

- a. Were you surprised by your classmates' reasons for a behavior? Why?
- b. If there were differences in the reasons you and your classmates listed, were they caused by differences in culture or by something else?

ORAL COMMUNICATION FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

Courses that are designed for academic purposes usually entail a specialized set of objectives and tasks, because students are learning the L2 for the purpose of pursuing a degree in the medium of the L2 (Belcher, 2009; Johns & Price, 2014). These courses often target certain disciplines, such as business, medicine, or law, which involve their own unique genres of language in both written and oral modes. In all disciplines, it's safe to say oral production skills in the academy share some commonalities in conventions for discussion and presentations, which we'll touch on briefly here.

Discussions

One of the most difficult aspects of L2 learning is developing the ability to initiate and sustain discussion in the classroom. In an era in which many classrooms around the world—in all disciplines—use a variety of group and pair work, being an active participant is essential. Students can no longer count on an academic course of study that will consist simply of a teacher or professor lecturing from start to finish.

So what are some of the skills that learners need to acquire? In Chapter 13 (page 275) we outlined some classroom language functions (Sarosy & Sherak, 2006) that are involved:

Classroom Language Functions

- interrupting another student (“ . . . Excuse me . . . ”)
- asking for clarification (“Sorry, what did you mean by ____?”)
- asking for more information (“Could you elaborate, please?”)
- agreeing and disagreeing politely (“I see your point, but . . . ”)
- supporting your opinion (“Let me tell you why . . . ”)
- coming to a consensus (“Would you all agree to . . . ?”)
- going over exercises with a partner (“Oh, I wrote something different”)
- giving oral feedback to peers' written work (“Have you thought about . . . ?”)

Figure 16.5 (page 370) is an excerpt from a textbook on academic English (Cassriel & Martinsen, 2010), a lesson that focuses on agreeing and disagreeing with a point of view. Following several exercises in listening and writing, students listen to a radio report in which several interviewees state their opinion.

Figure 16.5 Using waste vegetable oil (Cassriel & Martinsen, 2010, pp. 92–93)

3. Listen to excerpts from a radio report on using waste vegetable oil to power cars. In the Excerpt column of the chart, take notes on what each person says. Then compare your notes with a partner's. You will use the other columns of the chart later.

Excerpt	Ideas from the Lecture	Relationship between Ideas (Agree/Disagree)
1. Kent Glass, reporter <i>WVO = good alternative</i> <i>Oil = used twice</i> <i>Driving car = better for environment</i>	Using waste vegetable oil is like turning garbage into gold.	
2. Peter Berger, WVO user	WVO is cheap.	
3. Peter Berger, WVO user	WVO is easy to use.	
4. Kim Wei, environmental studies expert	WVO is a simple and green alternative to petroleum fuel.	

4. Compare the notes you took on each excerpt with the information in the Ideas from the Lecture column. In the Relationship between Ideas column, write **Agree** or **Disagree** to describe how the speaker in the excerpt would probably feel about the idea from the lecture.

5. Discuss the questions in small groups.

1. Which green chemistry principles from page 83 does WVO follow?



2. How does WVO compare to other fuels you have learned about? Explain your answers.

Example

In my opinion, WVO is better than other biofuels because . . .

3. What are some other solutions to our dependence on petroleum? What can we do as individuals and in our communities?

Three questions are posed for students to discuss, all requiring the use of classroom language.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

What are some specific phrases that students might use in discussing the questions listed in Figure 16.5, especially in agreeing or disagreeing with a classmate? For question 3, what are some ways a student could introduce some proposed solutions?

Presentations

A second distinguishing characteristic of academic oral communication is the frequent demand for making presentations. These range from brief, informal, quickly prepared monologues to longer “speeches” that are prepared well in advance and are more formal. The former might be less than a minute in duration while the latter could involve much longer stretches of time with potential question-and-answer periods following.

In Figure 16.6 (pages 372–373) we have included part of a unit for advanced students on giving a persuasive speech (Dale & Wolf, 2013). What has preceded this stage of the unit is listening to a speech, learning about presentation aids, pronunciation tips, and how to build on areas of agreement, including dealing with hostile listeners. Note that part of the preparation for giving a presentation involves interviewing classmates.

TEACHING PRONUNCIATION

Views on teaching pronunciation changed dramatically over the last half of the twentieth century (Lane, 2010; Murphy, 2013). In the heyday of the Audiolingual Method and its various behavioristic variants, the pronunciation component of a course or program was a mainstay. But in the 1970s, as the language-teaching profession began to experience revolutionary changes (see Chapter 2), explicit pedagogical focus on linguistic “nuts and bolts” was under siege by proponents of the various nondirective “let-it-just-happen” approaches to language teaching. Pronunciation instruction became somewhat incidental to a course of study.

However, the mid-1980s saw greater attention to grammatical structures as important elements in discourse, and to a balance between fluency and *accuracy*. With a focus on form becoming an accepted and necessary component of communicative approaches, and with convincing research providing support,

V. Presentation Project: A Speech to Persuade

Figure 16.6 A speech to persuade (Dale & Wolf, 2003, pp. 199–200). Reprinted by permission.

Choose a topic that is controversial and about which you feel strongly. Your project is to prepare and present a four- to five-minute speech to persuade. Your goal is to convince your audience to agree with your point of view.

V. Presentation Project: A Speech to Persuade

STEP 1 | Formulate a Persuasive Claim
 Choose a topic that is controversial and about which you feel strongly. Your project is to prepare and present a four- to five-minute speech to persuade. Your goal is to convince your audience to agree with your persuasive claim. You may choose any of the sample topics on page 182 or another one.

STEP 2 | Analyze the Audience Claim

A Review Analyzing Your Audience on page 185. Refresh your memory on how to choose a topic and formulate a persuasive claim. You may choose any of the sample topics on page 182 or another one.
B Interview as many classmates as possible to learn how they feel about your specific persuasive claim. Use the opinion survey form below to record your findings. If they disagree or are indifferent, ask them why.

A Review Analyzing Your Audience on page 185.

B Interview as many classmates as possible to learn how they feel about your specific persuasive claim. Use the opinion survey form below to record your findings. If they disagree or are indifferent, ask them why.

Record how each of your classmates feels about your topic by placing a checkmark in the appropriate column.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS FORM

Persuasive Claim: _____
 Disagree Indifferent Agree

Record how each of your classmates feels about your topic by placing a checkmark in the appropriate column.

Total =	Disagree	Total =	Indifferent	Total =	Agree
✓		✓		✓	
If your classmates are indifferent, it is because (check all reasons given):					
_____ They don't think your topic affects them.					
Total = _____					
_____ They have never heard of your topic.					

They have never given your topic any thought.
 If your classmates are indifferent, it is because (check all reasons given):

- _____ Other:
- _____ They don't think your topic affects them.
- _____ They have never heard of your topic.

They have never given your topic any thought.
 If your classmates disagree with your opinion, it is because (write all reasons given):

- 1. _____ Other: _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

If your classmates disagree with your opinion, it is because (write all reasons given):

- 4. 1. _____
- 5. 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Figure 16.6 A speech to persuade (*Continued*)**STEP 3 | Plan Your Speech**

A Review your completed outline of Feng's persuasive speech on page 195. Pay attention to the parts of his speech.

B Read the guidelines for organizing your speech.

Introduction

1. Build on areas of agreement.
2. State your specific persuasive claim.
3. Preview your main persuasive arguments.

Body

1. Include three persuasive arguments to support your claim.
2. Provide evidence.
 - Cite sources.
 - Use examples.
 - Use presentation aids.
3. Include transitions stating the reasons why listeners disagree with your claim and your intention to disprove those reasons.

Conclusion

1. Repeat your persuasive claim in the opening summary sentence.
Then summarize your main persuasive points.
2. Conclude with memorable remarks.

C Read the Useful Language you can use during your persuasive speech. Place a check mark ✓ next to the expressions you like best.

USEFUL LANGUAGE: BUILDING ON AREAS OF AGREEMENT

- I'm sure everyone here worries about . . .
- The majority of people would agree that . . .
- Most of us know someone who . . .
- We all love and care about our families and dear friends. Therefore we all hope that . . .

USEFUL LANGUAGE: TRANSITIONS

- Many of you disagree with [topic] because. . . . Let me assure you that . . .
- Some of you don't think [topic] is important. My evidence proves
 is very important.
- Many of you were against [topic] because. . . . I have solid proof that shows . . . [the opposite]

it became clear that pronunciation was a key to gaining full communicative competence.

Current approaches to pronunciation contrast starkly with the early approaches (Murphy, 2013). Rather than attempting only to build a learner's articulatory competence from the bottom up, and simply as the mastery of a list of phonemes and allophones, a top-down approach is taken in which the most relevant features of pronunciation—stress, rhythm, and intonation—are given high priority. Instead of teaching only the role of articulation *within* words, or at best, phrases, we teach its role in a whole stream of discourse.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

How did the prevailing language teaching methods of the mid-twentieth century justify a heavy focus on teaching pronunciation of segmental sounds and words? How does a focus on phonology in current communicative approaches differ? In what way is an approach that features stress, rhythm, and intonation a *top-down* approach?

Three decades ago, Wong (1987, p. 21) reminded us that “contemporary views [of language] hold that the sounds of language are less crucial for understanding than the way they are organized. . . . Rhythm and intonation merit greater priority in the teaching program than attention to individual sounds.” Wong’s comments reflected an approach that put all aspects of English pronunciation into the perspective of a communicative, interactive view of human speech. Once again, history taught us the lesson of maintaining balance.

Many learners of L2s feel that their ultimate goal in pronunciation should be accent-free speech that is indistinguishable from that of a native speaker. Such a goal is not only unattainable (see *PLLT*, Chapter 3) for virtually every adult learner, but in a multilingual, multicultural world, accents are quite acceptable. With the rapid spread of English as an international language, native accents pose virtually no barrier to cross-cultural communication. Moreover, as the world community comes to appreciate and value people’s heritage, one’s accent is just another symbol of that heritage.

Our goal as teachers of English pronunciation should therefore be more realistically focused on clear, comprehensible pronunciation. At the beginning levels, we want learners to surpass that threshold beneath which pronunciation detracts from their ability to communicate. At the advanced levels, pronunciation goals can focus on elements that enhance communication: intonation features that go beyond basic patterns, voice quality, phonetic distinctions between

registers, and other refinements that are far more important in the overall stream of clear communication than rolling the English /r/ or getting a vowel to perfectly imitate a native speaker.

What are the factors within learners that affect pronunciation, and how can you deal with each of them? Here is a list of variables to consider.

Learner Factors That Affect Pronunciation

1. **Native language.** Clearly, the native language is the most influential factor affecting a learner's pronunciation (see *PLLT*, Chapter 9). If you are familiar with the sound system of a learner's native language, you will be better able to diagnose student difficulties. Many L1–L2 carryovers can be overcome through a focused awareness and effort on the learner's part.
2. **Age.** Generally speaking, children under the age of puberty stand an excellent chance of “sounding like a native” if they have continued exposure in authentic contexts. Beyond the age of puberty, while adults will almost surely maintain a “foreign accent,” there is no particular advantage attributed to age (see *PLLT*, Chapter 3). A fifty-year-old can be as successful as an eighteen-year-old if all other factors are equal. Remind your students, especially if your students are older, that “the younger, the better” is a myth.
3. **Exposure.** It is difficult to define exposure. One can actually live in a foreign country for some time but not take advantage of being “with the people.” Research seems to support the notion that the quality and intensity of exposure are more important than mere length of time. If class time spent focusing on pronunciation demands the full attention and interest of your students, then they stand a good chance of reaching their goals.
4. **Innate phonetic ability.** Often referred to as having an “ear” for language, some people manifest a phonetic coding ability that others do not. In many cases, if a person has had exposure to a foreign language as a child, this “knack” is present whether the early language is remembered or not. Others are simply more attuned to phonetic discriminations. Some people would have you believe that you either have such a knack, or you don't. Strategies-based instruction (see Chapter 3, pp. 51–55), however, has proven that some elements of learning are a matter of an awareness of your own limitations combined with a conscious focus on doing something to compensate for those limitations. Therefore, if pronunciation

seems to be naturally difficult for some students, they should not despair; with some effort and concentration, they can improve their competence.

5. **Identity and agency.** Yet another influence is one's perception of speakers of the target language and the extent to which the L2 user identifies with those speakers. Learners need to be reminded of the importance of positive attitudes toward the people who speak the language (if such a target is identifiable), but more important, students need to become aware of—and not afraid of—the second identity that may be emerging within them.
6. **Motivation and concern for good pronunciation.** Some learners are not particularly concerned about their pronunciation, while others are. The extent to which learners' intrinsic motivation propels them toward improvement will be perhaps the strongest influence of all six of the factors in this list. If that motivation and concern are high, then the necessary effort will be expended in pursuit of goals. You can help learners to perceive or develop that motivation by showing, among other things, how clarity of speech is significant in shaping their self-image and, ultimately, in reaching some of their higher goals.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Language ego has been capsulized in the claim that “you are what you speak.” How would that factor *intimidate* a learner who is trying to be as accurate as possible in oral production? On the other hand, how might such a feeling actually *motivate* a learner to keep trying to improve pronunciation? If one's accent is a manifestation of one's *identity*, is it advisable to try to “lose” an accent that might signal one's native language?

All six of the above factors suggest that any learner who really wants to can learn to pronounce English clearly and comprehensibly. You can assist in the process by gearing your planned and unplanned instruction toward these six factors.

On the next few pages you will find excerpts of lessons designed to teach different aspects of English pronunciation, along with some description of

meaningful minimal pair exercises. Take note of how those techniques may capitalize on the positive benefits of the six factors above, and the extent to which they reflect a discourse-based view of pronunciation teaching. A significant factor for you in the success of such techniques lies in your ability to instill in your students the motivation to put forth the effort needed to develop clear, comprehensible pronunciation.

Figure 16.7 Listening for pitch changes (Adapted from Wong 1987, p. 61)

Record the following conversation and play it for the students. Establish the participants, the setting, and the event by asking the students to guess who and what they are.

He: Ready? ↗
 She: No. ↘
 He: Why? ↘
 She: Problems. ↘
 He: Problems? ↗
 She: Yes. ↘
 He: What? ↘
 She: Babysitter. ↘

After the students have figured out what is going on, you can play the conversation again. This time put the transcription of the conversation on the board or on an overhead projector and ask the students to try to determine for each utterance whether the speaker's voice ends with a rising or falling pitch. Draw arrows next to each utterance and play the conversation once more. To isolate pitch from the words, you can use a kazoo, which can be purchased at a toy store (see Gilbert, 1978). By humming into it, you can demonstrate rising and falling pitch to the amusement and illumination of your students.

Ask the students to explain what each utterance means. Then point out that a change in pitch can indicate a change in meaning (e.g., "Ready?" with a rising pitch means "Are you ready?" but "Ready" with a falling pitch means "I am ready").

Additional practice dialogues are provided here. Make up more for your particular students. Follow the procedure described for the first conversation.

Conversation B

A: Single?
 B: Double.
 A: Double?
 B: Yes.
 A: Cone?
 B: Cup.

Conversation C

A: Good?
 B: Delicious.
 A: More?
 B: Please.

Conversation D

A: Locked?
 B: Locked.
 A: Key?
 B: Key?
 A: Key.
 B: Oh-oh.

or *subway*, written as one word (although Spanish students often miss *boyfriend* and *girlfriend*). They have more difficulty with compounds written as two words, which are harder to recognize (e.g., *graduate students*, *post office*, *office building*). Nouns and adjectives formed from phrasal verbs (e.g., *the takeoff*, *my makeup*), have the same stress-pitch pattern as compounds. Phrasal verbs are discussed in Rhythm, page 69.

Figure 16.8 Compound nouns (Lane, 2010, pp. 33–34)

Activity 1.6 Compounds: Which came first?

Level Intermediate/Advanced

Worksheet Page 206

Tip Teach classes of words that have predictable stress patterns.

Description This activity practices compounds in the context of a trivia activity and can be integrated with other work on discoveries/inventions or technology. Students see pairs of compounds (e.g., cell phones, iPods) and decide which came first.

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CHAPTER 1

Word Use

Activity 1.6 continued

1. Direct students' attention to the compound pairs. Go over meaning if necessary.
2. Select one of the compounds and write it on the board. Write the first word higher than the second, to illustrate the pitch pattern. Model the compound and the isolated stress-pitch pattern (DA da). Ask the class whether the first or second word is pronounced on a higher pitch.

cell	phones
------	--------
3. Students listen to the compounds and repeat them.
4. In pairs, students decide which came first, guessing as needed. For example, cell phones were in use before iPods.
5. After the pair work, ask students to report which came first. Provide feedback on the stress-pitch pattern of the compounds—make sure students pronounce the first word on a higher pitch.

Stress with Verbs and Nouns with Prepositional Prefixes

What the Teacher Should Know

Most verbs with prepositional prefixes have primary stress on the verb and secondary stress on the prefix. *Traditional minimal pair drills: used for decades in language teaching, go some things like this* on the preposition: *overdose*, *outrage*, *outlaw*. These are not fixed rules, however, and speakers may stress either the preposition or the verb in order to maintain a more equal alternation of stresses:

T: Okay, class, on the board, picture number 1 is a "pen," and picture number 2 is a "pin." Listen: Pen [points to number 1], pin [points to number 2].

You really use 2 several repetitions. You really use 1 now. Why going to say either number 1 or number 2. You tell me which. Ready? [pause] Pin.

Because of the new vocabulary involved with these verbs, this topic is better suited to intermediate and advanced students.

Nouns and adjectives can be formed from some verbs with prepositional prefixes. These constructions are stressed on the preposition, following the general pattern for two-syllable nouns: *a positive outlook*, *an upswing in prices*, *an outburst of flu*. The adjective *outstanding* can be stressed either on the prefix or

T: Good. Ready. Pin.

Ss: Number 2.

T: Okay. [pause] Pen.

Ss: Number 1.

CLT and TBLT principles prod us to be a little more meaningful. In the following examples you can see that a little contextualization goes a long way:

T: This pen leaks.

S: Then don't write with it.

T: This pan leaks.

S: Then don't cook with it.

T: Where is the White House?

S: In Washington, D.C.

T: Where can I find a white house?

S: Right across the street.

T: The sun is hot on my head!

S: Then get a cap.

T: Oh, no, I missed the bus. I'm going to be late!

S: Then get a cab.

These are examples of drilling techniques that have been modified to bring context, interest, and a modicum of authenticity to what would otherwise be a mechanical task.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Consider some other minimal pairs, such as sheep/ship, glass/grass, bet/vet, and others. Try to devise a few other exercises, like the above, that add a little meaningfulness.

OTHER ORAL COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

The number of techniques for teaching OC skills is almost limitless. For the sake of stimulating your awareness, we'll simply list some of these here, and encourage you to explore the many other possibilities that are available. For some ideas, consult Klippel (1984), Hughes (2002), and Bailey (2005).

Oral Communication Techniques

Oral dialogue journals. Students create audio recordings of thoughts, reactions, questions, and concerns that the teacher can listen and respond to.

Games. Team building and guessing games can be used in pairs, groups, or the whole class.

Role play. Role play offers learners a chance to get “outside themselves,” to use their imagination, and at times to voice opinions that may not be their very own beliefs. Role play can be worked into interviews, simulations, and problem-solving activities.

Information gap. Sometimes called “jigsaw” exercises, these tasks require collaboration between or among students to derive the desired information. Activities range from map exercises, to ranking, to problem solving.

Oral form-focused activities. Some OC techniques are designed to elicit certain grammatical forms. In the context of relevant, meaningful communication, such techniques can be very useful practice exercises. (See the next section for examples.)

FOCUS ON FORM AND ERROR TREATMENT

One of the most frequently posed questions by teachers who are new to the trade is: When and how should I correct the speech errors of learners in my classroom? This happens also to be one of the most enigmatic questions in the language teaching profession. I offer some guidelines here, but at the same time urge you to read the last part of Chapter 9 of *PLLT*, where issues surrounding form-focused instruction are described in more detail.

The Role of Feedback

One of the keys to successful L2 learning lies in the feedback that a learner receives from others. Research has shown that the *quality* and *quantity* of feedback given to learners will affect what they eventually incorporate into their linguistic competence (Williams, 2005; Loewen, 2011; Sheen & Ellis, 2011; Spada, 2011).

The quality of feedback lies in what teachers choose to call to learners' attention, how they do it, when they do it, and in what manner. Four decades ago Vigil and Oller (1976) suggested that the *affective* quality of feedback is as important as its *cognitive* elements. So, for example, supportive, encouraging, and affirming verbal (and nonverbal) feedback from a teacher is an almost

essential element of the extent to which a learner will be *receptive* to feedback. And a barrage of interruptions and corrections will, of course, lead learners to shut off their attempts at communication. Once a positive affective climate is established, learners will feel encouraged to continue their attempts to communicate orally (Vigil & Oller, 1976).

The cognitive nature of feedback is a little more complicated, as we shall see in our next few sections, and as a stockpile of research has shown (Sheen & Ellis, 2011; Spada, 2011). The quantity of feedback is also relevant. Which errors should teachers treat? Should they supply overt, immediate “correction”? Should they make *incidental* references to form? How can they encourage learners to *notice* errors? Should error treatment be *planned* on the part of the teacher or *spontaneous*? These are issues that are still being addressed, but we do have some positive guidelines in recent research. Let’s look at those options.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Think of the feedback you give to learners as being “green lights” (positive, affirming) and “red lights” (intimidating, overwhelming). What are some specific ways in which you as a teacher could provide green lights to encourage students to continue communication? Do you think those green lights might be so encouraging that you actually end up reinforcing students’ errors? How do you achieve an optimum?

How to Treat Errors

In a very practical article on error treatment, James Hendrickson (1980) advised teachers to try to discern the difference between *global* and *local* errors, that is, errors that cannot be interpreted by the hearer versus errors that are interpretable. When a learner of English describes a quaint old hotel in Europe by saying, “There is a French widow in every bedroom,” the local error is clearly—and humorously—recognized. Hendrickson recommended that local errors not be corrected because the message is clear and correction might interrupt a learner’s flow of communication.

Global errors need to be treated in some way because the message may otherwise remain garbled. Many utterances are not clearly global or local, and it is difficult to discern the necessity for corrective feedback. A learner once wrote, “The grammar is the basement of every language.” In this witty little proclamation the speaker probably meant “basis” rather than “basement,” but because of some potential misunderstanding, the error probably warrants treatment.

The matter of *how* to treat errors is complex. It seems quite clear that students in the classroom generally *want* and expect errors to be corrected. However, correcting (or treating) every error is obviously not advisable. We can safely conclude that a sensitive and perceptive language teacher should make the language classroom a happy optimum, which may best be accomplished through a number of different treatment options.

The first choice that a teacher needs to make is to decide whether to *treat* an error or to *ignore* it. Then, if some form of treatment is warranted, consider the following options (adapted from Bailey, 1985, p. 111):

- treat immediately or delay to a more appropriate moment
- treat explicitly or give the student an opportunity to self-correct
- the teacher initiates treatment or defers to others (students)
- if the latter, defer to an individual or to the whole class
- return, or not, to the original error maker after treatment

Then, if some form of treatment is chosen, quite a number of strategies for treatment are possible. Among those are:

- simply indicate (possibly nonverbally) that an error occurred
- point out the location of the error (e.g., “You *go* to the store yesterday?”)
- recast, using the correct form (e.g., “Oh, I see, you *went* to the store?”)
- indicate the type of error (e.g., “What’s the past tense of *go*?”)

These basic options and strategies are common and viable modes of error treatment in the classroom. It’s important to understand that not all error treatment is error *correction*. Among the strategies listed above, none of them is an *explicit* correction, in which the wrong form is specified and the correct form provided. Error treatment encompasses a wide range of options, one of which—at the extreme end of a continuum—may be considered to be correction.

Research (Williams, 2005; Loewen, 2011; Sheen & Ellis, 2011; Spada, 2011) shows that the best way to help a learner to repair malformed utterances is, first, to assist the learner in *noticing* an incorrect form (through recasts, prompts, and other attention-getting devices), and second, for the learner to initiate repair (with as little prompting as possible from the teacher).

Figure 16.9 illustrates the split-second series of decisions that a teacher makes when a student has uttered a deviant form of English in the classroom. In those few nanoseconds, information is accessed, processed, and evaluated, with a decision forthcoming on what the teacher is going to “do” about the deviant form.

Imagine that you are a teacher and your student has made some sort of “deviant” utterance. Instantly, you run this speech event through a number of nearly simultaneous screens (1–10), not so much systematically as intuitively. You are now ready to decide whether to *treat* or *ignore* the deviation. If you

decide to do nothing, you simply move on. But if you decide to do something in the way of treatment, you have a number of treatment options, as discussed earlier, and as represented in the chart.

Notice that you, the teacher, do not always have to be the person who provides the treatment. Manner of treatment varies according to the input to the student, the directness of the treatment, the student's output, and your follow-up. After one very quick deviant utterance by a student, you have made an amazing number of observations and evaluations that go into the process of error treatment.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

How can you set the stage for students to treat each other's errors? They could stifle their classmates' production with too much correction, especially when another student has actually spoken correctly! How would you control this potentially undesirable level of peer corrections?

ASSESSING SPEAKING IN THE CLASSROOM

Assessing speaking skills in the classroom has one clear advantage over assessing listening: speech is observable, recordable, and measurable. However, once the criterion of your assessment moves beyond the phonological level, this advantage quickly disappears as *acceptable responses* are more difficult to specify reliably.

The prospect of designing classroom assessment procedures for oral production require the same preconsiderations that were outlined in the previous chapter: (1) Specify the category of speaking performance (from imitative to extensive) that is in question; and (2) describe the micro- and/or macroskills that are to be assessed. A further factor should also be taken into account: (3) the genre of spoken language that is being assessed. It's easier said than done, but the more specific you can be in pinpointing these three criteria, the greater the chances are that you will create a valid, reliable assessment procedure.

Item Types and Tasks for Assessing Speaking

So that you can gain an initial glimpse of options for assessing spoken language at the various levels of performance, we have listed some possibilities below. For a further, more comprehensive survey, we refer you to Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), a textbook on language assessment that includes a separate chapter on assessing speaking.

Types of Items and Tasks for Assessing Speaking

1. Imitative speaking tasks

- minimal pair repetition
- word/phrase repetition
- sentence repetition

2. Intensive speaking tasks

- directed response (Tell me he went home; Tell him to come see me.)
- read-aloud (for either pronunciation or fluency)
- oral sentence completion (Yesterday, I _____)
- oral cloze procedure (Yesterday, I _____ to the grocery store)
- dialogue completion (T: May I help you? S: _____)
- directed response (What did you do last weekend?)
- picture-cued elicitation of a grammatical item (e.g., comparatives)
- translation [into the L2] (of a word, phrase, or sentence or two)

3. Responsive speaking tasks

- picture-cued elicitation of response or description
- map-cued elicitation of directions (How do I get to the post office?)
- question and answer – open-ended (How do you like this weather?)
- question elicitation (Ask me about my hobbies and interests.)
- elicitation of instructions (What's the recipe for lasagna?)
- paraphrasing (of a short narrative or phone message)

4. Interactive speaking tasks

- oral interview
- role play
- discussions and conversations
- games

5. Extensive speaking tasks

- oral presentations [in academic or professional contexts]
- picture-cued [extensive] story-telling
- retelling a story or news event
- translation [into the L2] of an extended text (short story, news article)

Evaluating and Scoring Speaking Tasks

The evaluation of oral production performance can get quite complicated. First, you need to be clear in specifying the level of language you are targeting. One or more of at least six possible criteria may be your target:



CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING SPEAKING TASKS

- pronunciation
- fluency
- vocabulary
- grammar
- discourse features (cohesion, sociolinguistic appropriateness, etc.)
- task (accomplishing the objective of the task)



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

If you were to devise a scale for evaluating oral production, how much weight would you give to each of the above six criteria? Of course, this would depend on your context and objectives, but are some of the above criteria almost always more “important” than some others?

Some scales add “comprehension” to account for the extent to which a student has comprehended directions or elicitation. This category can be subsumed in the last two criteria above.

Within each of these categories you can judge a student’s response(s) to be at one of several possible levels of performance. Typically, we think of beginning, intermediate, and advanced as potential levels. But as we saw in Chapter 7, those categories are quite slippery. Moreover, three levels may not be sufficient for your classroom purposes, and you may wish to score performance on five or six levels, ranging from “novice” or “true beginner” to “superior” or “completely acceptable.” Whatever those categories are, it is important to describe them as clearly as possible in order to make reliable evaluations. For more on the issue of specifying scoring criteria, please consult Brown and Abeywickrama (2010).

Listening and speaking are the two skills that are most widely used for classroom interaction. By now, having covered the last two chapters, you have at least encountered many different parameters of these two skills, what they are, types of each, issues, some idea of the kinds of techniques that help to focus on either one or both of them, and may have a few guidelines for assessment.

FOR THE TEACHER: ACTIVITIES (A) & DISCUSSION (D)

Note: For each of the “Classroom Connections” in this chapter, you may wish to turn them into individual or pair-work discussion questions.

1. **(D)** Ask your students to think about the concept of fluency. Is it possible to devise an operational definition (by specifying measurable factors) of fluency through such variables as rate, pronunciation accuracy, colloquial language, errors, clarity, and other factors? What does the operational definition say about what one should teach?
2. **(A)** Ask pairs to review for each other the difference between accuracy and fluency, and discuss which should come first in a curriculum and under what circumstances. Then challenge them to think of some examples of how both fluency and accuracy might get attention within one task or technique.
3. **(D)** On page 348, the interlocutor effect was described. Ask the class to think of some specific examples of this interlocutor effect and share them with the rest of the class. How might this effect help one to formulate certain plans for grouping or pairing students?
4. **(D)** Review the nine factors (pp. 350–351) that make spoken language difficult. Ask your students to speculate on which is more difficult, speaking or listening (compare pp. 323–326). Ask for justifications of their responses.
5. **(A)** Look at the list of features of conversation (pp. 359–360) that need to be attended to in an OC class. Divide up the features among pairs and ask each pair to (a) cite some examples of the feature and (b) speculate on how one would teach that aspect of conversation. Ask pairs to share their conclusions with the rest of the class.
6. **(D)** If possible, obtain a video of an L2 class in which there is a considerable amount of oral activity. Using the list of microskills on page 352 as a checklist, ask your class to take notes on how various microskills manifested themselves. Ask for volunteers to share their ideas.
7. **(A)** Ask students to look again at the conversation between Bob and Amy (p. 355) and, in pairs, to identify as many of the seven factors of interpersonal exchange (cited just prior to the conversation) as possible. Then ask them to discuss how they would teach these factors; then have them share their ideas with the rest of the class.

8. (A) In the last section of this chapter, a number of principles of error correction are cited. In pairs, have students make up a short list (three or four) of “error correction maxims,” then share their maxims by writing them on the board and sharing them with the class. Through discussion, try to come up with a composite list of maxims.
9. (A) Ask small groups, each assigned to one of the five levels of assessment described in the last chapter, to pick one of the suggested tasks and design a short test for a classroom context that the group determines. Then, ask them to design a way to score or evaluate student performance on such a test. Have them report their result to the class.

FOR YOUR FURTHER READING

McCarthy, M., & O’Keeffe, A. (2010). Speaking in a second language. In M. Berns (Ed.), *Concise encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 212–218). Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

A survey of research on the teaching of speaking with a useful extensive bibliography.

Bailey, K. (2005). *Practical English language teaching: Speaking*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Richards, J. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lazaraton, A. (2014). Second language speaking. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. Brinton, & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed., pp. 106–120). Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning.

All three sources offer extensive surveys of techniques and tasks useful in teaching oral communication skills. They also offer synopses of research along with bibliographies.

Lane, L. (2010). *Tips for teaching pronunciation: A practical approach*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman.

Murphy, J. (2013). *Teaching pronunciation*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Goodwin, J. (2014). Teaching pronunciation. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. Brinton, & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed., pp. 136–152). Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning.

These sources offer synopses of the state of the art in teaching pronunciation along with extensive batteries of practical techniques, covering stress, intonation, rhythm, segmental phonemes, as well as pronunciation within the context of discourse.