

36 Stress, rhythm and intonation

A Warm-up

- 1 Work in pairs. Do the activity and discuss what it demonstrates.

Imagine you are in a bar or café, and you've both just finished a drink, or a slice of chocolate cake. Have a conversation in which you use only the word 'Well'. The conversation should convey these meanings:

A: That was nice!
 B: Shall we have another one?
 A: I shouldn't really.
 B: I'm going to have another one, even if you're not.
 A: If you're going to insist...
 B: You're easily convinced – you surprise me!

- 2 Discuss whether learners would find this activity easy or difficult. Give reasons for your opinion.

B Stress

Stress is the prominence that is given to particular syllables (in a word) or to particular words (in an utterance).

- 1 Work in pairs. Read these invented words and try to predict the way that each one is stressed. Decide what the results of this exercise suggest about the rules of word stress in English.
 pawler veddle malnish pandiful loomitive loomition imbelist imbelistic
 geon geonics geonetics geonetology geonetological
- 2 Identify six to eight vocabulary items relating to a particular theme (such as jobs, food and drink, clothing, etc.) in the coursebook you are currently using with your teaching practice class. Then answer the questions.
 - 1 Which is the stressed syllable in each of these words?
 - 2 What techniques could you use to highlight the stress?
- 3 Work in pairs. Read these short dialogues aloud, taking turns to read sentences A and B. Then answer the questions.

A: Let's invite Jack to dinner next Saturday.
 B: No, let's invite Jack to dinner next Friday.
 A: Let's invite Jack to dinner next Saturday.
 B: No, let's invite Jill to dinner next Saturday.
 A: Let's invite Jack to dinner next Saturday.
 B: No, let's invite Jack to lunch next Saturday.
 A: Let's invite Jack to dinner next Saturday.
 B: No, let's not invite Jack to dinner next Saturday.

C Rhythm

- 1 In what way does the second sentence change?
- 2 Why does the sentence change in this way?
- 4 Work in pairs or groups of three. Write a short dialogue (6–8 lines) between two people who have just been introduced at a party. Include at least one example of an utterance that is repeated by another speaker, but with a change of stress. Mark the main stressed word in each utterance.
- 5 Decide how you could use this dialogue in class.

- 1 Work in pairs. Take turns to read aloud the following sentences so that each sentence takes the same number of beats as the first sentence (which you should read fairly slowly and deliberately). It may help to beat the rhythm with your hand. Then answer the questions.

Words	take	stress.
Words	take	stress.
Words should	take	stress.
Words should	take	stress.
Words should	take the	stress.
Some words should	take the	stress.
Some words should	take the	stress.
Some words should've	taken the	stress.
Some of the words should've	taken the	stress.
Some of the words should've	taken the	stress.

- 1 What happens to the individual words as the sentence becomes longer?
- 2 Why might this create a problem for students – in terms of both listening and speaking?
- 2 Study this coursebook activity, and decide what aspect of pronunciation it targets.
- 3 Work in pairs. Discuss how this aspect of pronunciation might be connected with rhythm.

3 Remember that some words have two pronunciations: a 'weak form' and a 'strong form'. Examples:

MUST	CAN	HAVE	WAS
WEAK: /ms, mast/	/kn, ken/	/(h)əv/	/w(ə)z/
STRONG: /mʌst/	/kæn/	/hæv/	/wɒz/

Which pronunciation do *must*, *can*, *have* and *was* have in these sentences? Write W (weak) or S (strong). Don't worry about negatives – they're always strong.

1. Of course she must.
2. I think I must phone my mother today.
3. I can't come today, but I can tomorrow.
4. When can we leave?
5. I wonder where the twins have gone.
6. We haven't lost Ted, have we?
7. I think I'll have a shower.
8. That *was* a nice dinner. Thank you so much.
9. Yes, she was.

D Intonation

1 Work in pairs. Say each of the following pairs of sentences aloud in two different ways, paying attention to the punctuation and other non-verbal signs. Then answer the questions.

- 1 What is the difference in meaning?
- 2 How is this difference conveyed?

For example:

I like Chinese art and opera. I like [Chinese art and opera] (= Chinese art and Chinese opera)
I like Chinese art, and opera. I like [Chinese art] and opera (= Chinese art and any kind of opera)

- a (1) The people who left suddenly – started running.
 (2) The people who left – suddenly started running.
- b (1) My brother who lives in New York has a penthouse.
 (2) My brother, who lives in New York, has a penthouse.
- c (1) She didn't marry him – because of his parents.
 (2) She didn't marry him because of his PARENTS ...
- d (1) You're a nurse.
 (2) You're a nurse?
- e (1) Dan's not English, is he!?
 (2) Dan's not English, is he?
- f (1) (*What's the capital of Mexico?*) Mexico City.
 (2) (*What's the capital of Mexico?*) Mexico City?
- g (1) We need eggs sugar milk butter.
 (2) We need eggs sugar milk butter ...
- h (1) Hi!!!!
 (2) Hi.
- i (1) Thanks a lot. ☺
 (2) Thanks a lot. ☹

2 In the light of the above exercise, decide what effects changes in intonation have.

- 3 Work with a partner. Discuss ways in which problems with intonation might prejudice communication.
- 4 Study the following two activities and decide what function of intonation each of them focuses on.

1 Listen to these two short conversations. The words are exactly the same in both conversations, but in one Speaker A sounds polite, and in the other she doesn't. Can you tell which is which? What is the difference?

- A: What's your name?
 B: James.
 A: Your full name?
 B: James Haddon.
 A: What nationality are you?
 B: Australian.
 A: Why do you want a visa?
 B: For tourism.

Now, practise saying the dialogue in the polite way.

2 Listen to these questions. In which questions does the person who is asking the question

a) know the answer; b) not know the answer?

- a You're married, aren't you?
- b You're married, aren't you?
- c It's not raining again, is it?
- d It's a lovely day, isn't it?
- e You'll phone, won't you?
- f You won't be late, will you?

Now, practise saying the following questions in two ways ...

REFLECTION

Discuss these questions in pairs or groups.

- a Which of the following areas do you think is most critical in ensuring communicative effectiveness? Why?
 - i accurate production of individual sounds (i.e. vowels and consonants)
 - ii accurate stress placement in words
 - iii accurate stress placement in utterances
 - iv accurate production of strong and weak forms
 - v native-like rhythm
 - vi accurate use of intonation
- b Which of the above areas do you think is the most easily learnable? Why?

37 Teaching pronunciation

A Warm-up

- 1 Study these learner errors. Identify the area of pronunciation that each of them relates to.

Learner pronunciation	Correct version
a Our president is very im portant.	Our president is very im P ortant.
b It is bad to heat children.	It is bad to hit children.
c It's a nice day, isn't it?	It's a nice day, isn't it
d Who are you waiting FOR ?	Who are you WAITING for?
e How many beebie live there?	How many people live there?
f IF ONLY I HAD KNOWN!	If only I'd KNOWN!

- 2 Work with a partner. Discuss these statements and decide to what extent you agree.
- The best model for teaching pronunciation is RP (*Received Pronunciation*, i.e. the regionally neutral, prestige accent of Britain).
 - Mispronunciation of individual sounds (the 'small' features) is less important than errors at the level of stress, intonation and rhythm ('big' features).
 - It is hard to unlearn incorrect habits; therefore it is important to get pronunciation right as soon as possible.
 - Intelligibility (i.e. being understood) is more important than sounding like a native speaker.
 - One of the best ways of teaching pronunciation is always to speak naturally to the learners.

B Pronunciation exercises

- 1 Study the pronunciation activities below and answer the questions.
- What aspect of pronunciation is each activity targeting? Is it a 'small' feature (such as individual sounds) or a 'big' feature (such as sentence stress or intonation)?
 - Is the objective of the activity *reception* or *production* (or both)?
 - Is the feature used in context or is it decontextualised?
 - How *communicative* is the activity? Could non-communicative activities be adapted to make them more communicative?

2 The teacher demonstrates the difference in the pronunciation of the *-ed* ending on *worked*, *lived* and *started*. She then asks students to make three columns in their books, headed by /t/, /d/ and /ɪd/ respectively. She reads out a list of past tense words, e.g. *opened*, *walked*, *moved*, *lifted*, *missed*, *waited* etc.; the students write each one in the appropriate column.

b The teacher prepares cards of rhyming words, e.g. *steak*, *make*, *do*, *true*, etc. In groups, students take turns to table the cards; if a card rhymes with the preceding card, the player keeps the pair. The winner is the player with the most pairs.

c The teacher tells a story that the students know, making deliberate mistakes, which the class have to correct. For example:
 T: Little Red Riding Hood lived in a cottage in the middle of a desert.
 L: No, she lived in the middle of a wood.
 T: Oh, yes, she lived near a wood.
 L: No, in a wood...

d The teacher prepares cards on which are written different quantities of money, e.g. 5 cents; 50 cents; 5 dollars; 50 dollars; 500 dollars, etc. She hands individual students the cards, saying 'Here's a present for you'. The students should respond by saying 'Thank you' in a way that is proportionate to the amount of the gift.

e The teacher sets up a speaking exercise, e.g. dialogue, role play, chat, etc. When students make a mistake in their pronunciation, the teacher acts 'dumb', e.g. she says, or indicates, 'I'm sorry, I don't understand'. The student tries to correct him/herself.

f The teacher plays a short section (one sentence or less) of recorded speech, and leaves a few moments' silence to allow the sound of the words to register. The students are asked to echo the segment internally without speaking. The teacher replays the segment. This time, the students 'subvocalise', i.e. repeat the segment under their breath. Next the students are asked to speak aloud and in step with the recording ('shadowing'). The segment is repeated a number of times and then a new segment is attempted.

The Pronunciation Book Bowen and Marks

- 2 Work in groups. Evaluate the activities in B1. For example, discuss whether, as a learner, you would like to do them. Decide whether you think they would improve your pronunciation. Give reasons.

C Anticipating problems

- 1 Work in pairs. Discuss the pronunciation problems learners might have with these syllabus areas.
- can/can't* (to talk about ability)
(Possible problem: failure to discriminate between weak and strong forms, so that *can* sounds like *can't*...)
 - ordinal numbers, i.e. *first*, *second*, *third*, *fourth*, etc.
 - used to* (to talk about past habits)
 - present simple questions, e.g. *Where does she live? What do you do?*

- e polite requests using *would you mind ... -ing?*
 - f clothing vocabulary, e.g. *shirt, shorts, suit, shoes, jacket, coat, scarf*, etc.
- 2 Your trainer will assign you one of the above areas. Think of classroom solutions to the problems that students might have. For example:
- a *can/can't*
- Possible solution: the teacher repeats one of the words several times and then changes to the other word. Learners have to stop the teacher when they hear the change – *can can can can't can't can't can't can*, etc. (Learners could then do this in pairs.)

D Classroom application

Study this extract from a coursebook (with its accompanying transcript). No explicit pronunciation work has been included. Decide where you think it would be appropriate to include some work on pronunciation and what form this could take.

Useful language

- 1 Look at these expressions in a clothes shop, and mark them. C for customer and A for assistant.
- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| Asking
I'm just looking, thanks.
Can I help you?
What size would you like?
Have you got this in a size 12 / a medium?
I'll just have a look.
I'll take it / them. | Trying on
Could I try it / them on, please?
The fitting rooms are over there.
Any good?
It's a bit tight / big / small.
Do you think I could try on a bigger one? | Paying
Can I pay by credit card?
How would you like to pay?
Cash or credit card?
Your receipts in the bag. |
|---|--|--|
- 2 [3.3] Listen to this dialogue and tick (✓) the expressions you hear.
- 3 Which expressions could be useful for buying other things?
- 4 Compare these two questions. Which is more polite?
Where are the CDs, please? *Could you tell me where the CDs are, please?*

Practice

- 1 **Against the clock** [3 minutes] Make these sentences more polite.
- 1 I want to try it on.
 - 2 Where's the shampoo?
 - 3 Give me a phonecard.
 - 4 I want you to dry clean this suit today.
 - 5 How much is this?
 - 6 Give me a smaller one to try.
 - 7 Where are the fitting rooms?
- 2 [3.4] Listen and check your ideas. Repeat the sentences and try to sound exactly the same.

3 In pairs. Make short dialogues which include these phrases.

- A *Could I have a film for this camera, please?*
- B *Would you like black and white or colour?*

A *Colour, please.*

- 1 black and white or colour?
- 2 where the travel books are?
- 3 dry clean this jacket?
- 4 battery for my camera?
- 5 shirt costs?
- 6 I'm sorry, we haven't got any fitting rooms.
- 7 wash, cut, and blow dry.
- 8 24 aspirin?
- 9 film starts?

[3.3]

- | | | | |
|-----------|---|----------|--|
| Assistant | Hello, can I help you? | Cashier | How would you like to pay? |
| Customer | Yes, have you got this in a size 12? | Customer | Cash, please. |
| Assistant | In blue? | Cashier | That'll be 15.99, then. |
| Customer | Yes, in blue. | Customer | There you are. |
| Assistant | I'll just have a look. Yes, here you are. | Cashier | 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. Thanks. Your receipts in the bag. Goodbye. |
| Customer | Could I try it on, please? | Customer | Thanks very much. Bye. |
| Customer | Thank you. | | |
| Assistant | Any good? | | |
| Customer | I think it's a bit tight. Do you think I could try on a bigger one? | | |
| Assistant | Yes, I'll see if we've got a 14. | | |
| Assistant | Better? | | |
| Customer | Yes, I'll take it. | | |
| Assistant | Great, OK, if you could take it to the cash desk. | | |

[3.4]

- 1 Could I try it on, please?
- 2 Can you tell me where the shampoo is?
- 3 I'd like to buy a phonecard, please.
- 4 Can I pay by credit card?
- 5 Could you possibly dry clean this suit today?
- 6 Could you tell me how much this is?
- 7 Can I try a smaller one, please?
- 8 Could you tell me where the fitting rooms are?

Clockwise (Pre-Intermediate) McGowen and Richardson

REFLECTION

- 1 Read these terms, which relate to the teaching of pronunciation. Check that you understand the meaning of them.
 - integrated
 - intelligible
 - communicative
 - receptive
 - accent
 - context
 - English as an International Language (EIL)
 - teachable
 - RP
- 2 Choose at least three of the terms and use each one in a sentence in order to sum up your own views on pronunciation teaching.
- 3 Compare your sentences in pairs or groups.