

ENGLE205F

Module 2

Skills and strategies for speaking

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Introduction

Module 2 offers a guide to what is involved in demonstrating your competence in spoken English. In *Module 6* we focus on the specific skills you need to prepare for the IELTS Speaking test.

Competent speaking involves both knowledge and skill. Competent speakers understand the way the language operates in conversation, are able to draw on a broad range of vocabulary and fixed expressions, and have a command of grammar and pronunciation. They are able to put this knowledge to active use in fluent, coherent and accurate speaking.

This module explores key knowledge areas underlying competent speaking. For example, it discusses the important role of fluency and coherence; and it looks at ways of extending your vocabulary range and enriching your speech structurally. It also explores in detail the aspects of English pronunciation, stress and intonation that you will need to master. In other words, the module addresses three important criteria of the IELTS Speaking test – fluency and coherence, lexical resource and pronunciation.

In the module, you will:

- learn about the structure of conversational interaction by considering turn-taking;
- learn how to support another speaker by responding appropriately;
- increase the fluency of your own speech by using hesitation devices;
- explore the nature of good conversational behaviour by looking at Grice's maxims;
- enrich your vocabulary and phrases by considering language used in specific speech functions;
- learn about five common general structures for organizing speech;
- review your knowledge and skills in English pronunciation, stress and intonation; and
- learn how to create a good impression through register and clarity.

Conversational interaction

Like all aspects of language use, conversation is governed by rules. When English speakers engage in a conversation, they observe rules governing when it is appropriate to make a contribution to the conversation and the form that contribution should take. For our purposes in this module, the most important of these rules concern the formalities of turn-taking and conversational behaviour.

Turn-taking

Polite conversations in English are generally well-ordered. Speakers don't speak at the same time as other speakers – they take turns to speak. They don't interrupt another speaker who is taking his or her turn, but wait for the opportune moment to respond or make a new point. Turn-taking is governed by a set of complex and subtle rules. By following these rules you can avoid causing offence when you engage in conversation.

In their book, *Conversations and Dialogues in Action*, Dornyei and Thurrel (1992)¹ set out some basic principles of turn-taking, from which the following points are adapted:

- **When and how does a speaker pass the turn to another speaker?**
 - by saying something to which a reaction is expected – a question, a compliment, an offer, a request
 - by signalling that he/she is finishing – 'Well anyway ...', 'So ...', 'Last but not least ...'
 - by lowering pitch and volume/slowing down his/her speech/lengthening the last syllable.
- **When and how can a speaker take up a turn?**
 - by responding to a question, compliment, offer or request
 - by waiting for a pause or a gap
 - by signalling the desire to speak using *interjections* (see below) or body language – leaning forward, gestures, facial expression, etc.
 - by completing, or adding something to, what the previous speaker said.

¹ Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall International.

Helping the conversation to flow

Making meaningful noises

Although we are considering the rules of turn-taking in conversation, it is important to realize that conversation is not a mechanical pattern of speakers taking turns in an orderly fashion, with each one waiting silently for his or her turn to speak. This is the impression which many English language textbooks give, but in reality conversations are collaborative activities. When we participate in a conversation, we don't merely wait passively for our turn to speak; we actively help the current speaker by responding to what he or she is saying. We do this by making meaningful noises, or *interjections*.

Below are some of the more common interjections we make in helping a conversation to flow.

Interjection	Function	Meaning
'Ah'	Realizing	'Ah, I understand.'
'Ah well'	Accepting	'Ah well, I can't change that.'
'Hmm'	Doubting	'Hmm, I'm not sure that's true.'
'Oh'	Being surprised	'Oh, I didn't know that.'
'Oh dear'	Sympathizing	'Oh dear, that's a pity.'
'Uh-huh'	Agreeing	'Uh-huh, that's right.'
'Right'	Affirming	'Yes, that's right.'
'Uh?' (with rising intonation)	Questioning	'Uh, are you sure?'

Activity 2.1

In their book, *Teaching the Spoken Language*, Brown and Yule (1983)² analyse examples of natural speech. In the monologue below, a speaker is describing a traffic accident. Imagine he is speaking to you and you want to help his conversation flow. Look at the script of what he says and identify places where you could make a contribution to the conversation. Rewrite the monologue below (adapted from page 140) in the form of a dialogue between two speakers:

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

It's erm – an intersection of kind of two – kind of crossroads – of a minor road going across a major road – and I was standing there – and there was this, erm – kind of ordinary car – on the minor road – just looking to come out – onto the big road – and coming down towards him on the big road was a van – followed by a lorry – now – just as he started to come out onto the main road – the van – no the lorry star – started to overtake the van – not having seen the fact that another car was coming out.

Helping your own conversation flow

Meaningful noises which help you think

In addition to the interjections we studied earlier, we use a number of other meaningful noises when we speak in order to give ourselves time to think. These may be noises, such as 'mmm' or 'erm', or phrases, such as 'Let me think'. They serve at least two important functions – they help to make our speech more fluent and they gently ensure that another speaker does not take his or her turn to speak while we are hesitating.

Below are some of the more common of these hesitation devices.

Hesitation device	Function	Meaning
'Erm'	Hesitating	'Erm, let me think a minute ...'
'Well'	Introductory remark	'Well, I would like to study medicine.' 'Well' is one of the most used words in English. It acts as an entry into what you want to say and can be used to give oneself a little time to think.
'So' (with elongated <i>o</i> sound)	Introducing a conclusion or summary	'So, this means that ...'
'Oh'	Self-interrupting	'Oh, I'm sorry – let me say that again.'
'Er'	Hesitating	'Er ..., let me think.'

Although these are features of natural conversation which a second language learner should be aware of, it is important not to overuse them. If your speech is peppered with too many hesitation devices, it gives the impression of lack of fluency and indecisiveness. The same applies to the use of prepared phrases such as 'let me think ...' and 'in my opinion ...'.



Activity 2.2

Listen to the examples of the sounds discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 1. Repeat the sounds after you have listened a few times. Try to imitate the sounds and expressions you hear. Record them yourself and then listen for any problems.

Conversational behaviour

The ways in which English speakers expect other speakers to behave in a conversation have been neatly summarized in four *conversational maxims* in a famous article by Paul Grice³. The four maxims concern quantity, quality, relevance and manner, and are summarized in the box below.

Maxim of quantity:

- 1 Make your contribution to the conversation as informative as necessary.
- 2 Do not make your contribution to the conversation more informative than necessary.

Maxim of quality:

- 1 Do not say what you believe to be false.
- 2 Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of relevance:

Be relevant (i.e. say things related to the current topic of the conversation).

Maxim of manner:

- 1 Avoid obscurity of expression.
- 2 Avoid ambiguity.
- 3 Be brief (avoid unnecessary wordiness).
- 4 Be orderly.

Although Grice never intended to provide rules of conversational behaviour in establishing the four maxims, the maxims nevertheless provide clear guidelines for learners in understanding how to behave in conversations conducted in English. The best way to understand them is by looking at some obvious violations.

Activity 2.3

Look at the following examples of conversations and say how one or other of the two speakers has violated one of the maxims:

³ Grice, H P (1975) 'Logic and conversation' in Cole, P and Morgan, J L (eds) *Speech Acts*, New York: Academic Press, 41–58.

Conversation 1

A Good afternoon, may I help you?

B Yes, I am looking for the doctor's surgery. I have a terrible pain in my finger because I squashed it when I was moving furniture in my office. I wasn't comfortable with the old arrangement and I couldn't wait for the porter to help me move it.

Conversation 2

A Have you been to Kowloon Tong to collect that cheque? It's urgent.

B Well, as a matter of fact, I thought I'd go and buy some shelves for the dining room this afternoon. Do you think that's a good idea?

A I asked you about the cheque!

Conversation 3

A There's always a dearth of taxis at this hour and a superfluity of minibuses all of which are chock-a-block!

B I beg your pardon?

A Oh never mind.

Although the examples in Activity 2.3 are rather extreme, we can learn something important from them and from Grice's maxims generally:

- *Quantity*: When engaging in conversation, don't say too much or too little. Try to ensure that what you say gives sufficient information.
- *Quality*: Be honest and don't say things you are not sure are true.
- *Relevance*: Keep to the point.
- *Manner*: Speak clearly and be clear in what you say, and avoid obscure expressions which could have more than one meaning.

In the following section, we discuss how you can apply these general principles when using the spoken language to perform specific functions such as recalling something that happened to you (narrating/explaining/reporting) or discussing future plans (speculating/hoping/wishing).

Speech functions

Spoken language can be organized into functional categories. This kind of categorization is very useful to the second language learner, especially when examples are provided of the language used to perform the various functions. This is because each function has specific language features (vocabulary, expressions and grammatical structures). In this section, we look at a number of common speech functions and consider the language features associated with them.

Here is a list of common functions.

narrating	describing	offering
explaining	ranking	expressing preferences
stating an opinion	reporting	comparing
justifying	asking	speculating
classifying	excusing	hoping
confirming	requesting	wishing
denying	suggesting	self-correcting
identifying	warning	

Below are examples of the way these functions are used. Try to identify the specific language features associated with each one, before reading the list of 'Features to note'.

Narrating

I once had a seafood dinner on one of the outlying islands. It tasted okay but on the way home I started to feel very strange. Then I had really bad stomach-ache. I won't go into details, but I had an awful night and went straight to the doctor the next day. I was ill for days. That's the worst food poisoning I have ever had.

Features to note:

- a Use of the simple past tense
- b Words that help with sequencing: 'once', 'later', 'then', 'next', 'finally'
- b Different ways of organizing narrative – summary/detail/evaluation; background/problem/solution/evaluation

Explaining

I work in an import–export company. Basically, I am one of the general admin staff. I handle the correspondence – letters, faxes and emails and things like that. I also look after all the paperwork necessary for

shipping – that part's a bit complicated. Well, that's the theory but it is quite a small company, so I might have to do anything really!

Features to note:

- a Use of present simple tense
- b Organization – summary/detail/evaluation; comment
- c Use of words/expressions such as:

Let me give you an example.

To cut a long story short ...

Briefly ...

Basically ...

It's a bit complicated, but ...

Hard to say exactly, but ...

Stating an opinion

I believe it is very important to maintain our health and physical fitness, so I play a lot of sport, mainly tennis. I find it makes me feel mentally relaxed and, of course, it's a good way of keeping in touch with old, and making new, friends.

Features to note:

- a Organization – statement of opinion followed by justification with evidence
- b Overused expression to avoid: 'In my opinion ...'
- c Use of expressions such as:

It is my belief ... / I believe ... / I tend to believe ...

It seems to me ...

If you ask me ...

It's my conviction ...

In my view ...

I reckon ...

Justifying

Air pollution: I say that for two main reasons. It has terrible consequences for our health, and it makes the city far less attractive to tourists – after all, why should someone travel all the way to Hong Kong if they can't even see the harbour from the Peak?

Features to note:

- a Use of words such as: 'reason', 'argument', 'point', 'case', 'explanation', 'rationale'
- b Use of logical, moral and emotional arguments
- c Common error to avoid: 'The reason is because ...'

Classifying

Well, I'd say there are two types of festival to think about. There are family ones and public ones, if I can call them that. My favourite of the first type is Chinese New Year. It isn't what we do but the family all being together. For the second type, I like Christmas with lights, parties and presents. It's great fun.

Features to note:

- a Organization – number of categories / names of categories / features of each category
- b Use of words such as: 'category', 'group', 'type', 'sort', 'kind'
- c Justification for categorization using words/expressions such as: 'criteria', 'factor', 'more than one way of looking at it'

Confirming

Yes, indeed, I would definitely say my schooldays were very happy. I looked forward to going to school and being with my friends, and I had some excellent teachers, some of whom I am still in touch with.

Features to note:

- a Organization – topic sentence or confirmatory statement, followed by justification/elaboration
- b Use of words/expressions such as: 'definitely', 'totally', 'absolutely', 'indeed', 'go along with'

Denying

No, I can't agree that Hong Kong lacks cultural activities. There are fine exhibitions in the museums, film festivals, Chinese opera, classical music performances, dance and a host of other things. There's certainly more going on than I can keep up with.

Features to note:

- a Organization – topic sentence, followed by justification/elaboration
- b Use of words/expressions such as: 'cannot agree', 'doubt', 'dissent', 'on the contrary'

Identifying

My favourite restaurant is a small one in the back streets of Wanchai, not far from the MTR. It only has one dish – a special chicken which they serve with rice and green vegetables. The taste is simply perfect.

Features to note:

- a 'Favourite' is an absolute term and can't be used with 'more' and 'most'.
- b Importance of picking out the most significant characteristic

Describing

I am very fond of Stanley Village. The waterfront is interesting with its row of low-rise buildings, most of them restaurants that open to the street so you can see what is going on inside. Then there's the big open space with the charmingly colonial Murray House with its columns and more nice places to sit and eat and drink. There's even a colourful Chinese temple just beyond. Then there's the sound and smell of the sea.

Features to note:

- a Descriptive language that relies heavily on adjectives and adverbs
- b Description that draws on the five senses

Ranking

My favourite style of food is, naturally enough, Cantonese. I think everyone prefers the food they grow up with. After that I would say Japanese. It has such clean and simple flavours and lots of seafood. Third, I am not so sure – maybe Italian: good pasta is hard to beat.

Features to note:

- a Top ranking: 'popular', 'first-class', 'five-star', 'élite', 'cream', 'leading', 'champion', 'winner', 'foremost', 'supreme', 'leading'
- b Middle ranking: 'nothing special', 'middling', 'average'
- c Bottom ranking: 'least attractive', 'loser', 'pits', 'bottom of the pile'

Reporting

I remember one teacher we were quite cruel to. We used to play tricks on her. Then one of the teachers found out and came and warned us she would report us all to the principal if we didn't stop and treat her more kindly. That made us change and things were much better after that.

Features to note:

- a Importance of altering tenses when reporting speech

- b Use of words/expressions such as: ‘recall’, ‘remember’, ‘brings to mind’, ‘recollect’

Asking

It’s hard to say what the best method to learn a language is, isn’t it? At school I found listening to songs very helpful. I wanted to know what the lyrics meant and soon learned them by heart, so it worked for me. But that doesn’t mean it would work for everyone, does it?

Features to note:

- a Importance of using the appropriate intonation both for politeness and meaning (some rules are given in the ‘Intonation’ section later in this module)
- b Importance of using a rising tone for open questions and a falling one for tag-questions that ask for agreement

Excusing

I haven’t really ever thought about that, so I’m sorry I am not sure what to say. Anyway, I will say Hawaii. I would love to visit Hawaii. The climate seems good and I am sure I would find the diving wonderful.

Features to note:

- a Use of words ‘afraid’, ‘pardon’, and ‘sorry’
- b Importance of giving reasons

Requesting

I’m sorry, but could you repeat that? The noise outside made me miss it.

Features to note:

- a Importance of softening a request with an apology or complex structure, e.g. ‘I wonder if you’d mind ...’
- b Use of modal verbs for politeness, such as ‘could’, ‘would’, ‘may’

Suggesting

I’d suggest people coming to Hong Kong for just a short time should allow one day for shopping and visit the area where they can get the goods they’re interested in – clothes, electrical equipment, software, or whatever; one day doing a standard tour; and one day visiting an outlying island.

Features to note:

- a Common error to avoid: following the verb ‘suggest’ with a *to*-infinitive

- b Use of words/expressions such as: 'recommend', 'suggest', 'propose', 'if it were up to me', 'the best would be ...'

Warning

My worst experience was taking a boat trip in western China. I was really afraid when we were on the water. There were no life-jackets and I thought there were too many people on the boat. There was a sudden storm and the boat was rocking horribly. I would say: you had better never go on small local boats when you are travelling in less developed places. They are not safe.

Features to note:

- a Use of expressions such as: 'caution people against', 'strongly advise', 'ask people to think carefully before ...', 'better safe than sorry'
- b Use of the structure 'had better'

Offering

Shall I tell you about my grandfather? He was a fisherman and was away from home a lot of the time. He was really dark-skinned from being outdoors most of the time and used to tell us stories about sharks and storms. I often wonder if they were true or not.

Features to note:

- a Importance of eye contact when asking a question like this so that one can note the other person's nod
- b Range of constructions used in making offers of different degrees of formality, from 'Can I?' to 'Would you like me to?'

Expressing preferences

If I could choose anywhere, I think I would like to spend a year in San Francisco. I have seen it on television so many times and it looks lovely. I know the climate is good with lots of sunshine and there's a large Chinatown, so I wouldn't get homesick. Oh, but I am forgetting the earthquake risk! Maybe that isn't the best choice.

Features to note:

- a Use of words/expressions such as: 'choose', 'select', 'opt for', 'nominate', 'plump for', 'pick', 'my cup of tea', 'rather'
- b Importance of getting the stress right in long words like 'preference'

Comparing

Studying at university is more fun than at school. At school there is too much discipline and some students don't want to be there, but it's not

like that with university classes. Everyone wants to do their best. And, of course, there are far more activities and opportunities to do things – exchange programmes and so on.

Features to note:

- a Avoiding double comparatives ('more sicker')
- b Use of 'than' in comparisons
- c Use of expressions such as 'like comparing apples with oranges', which is used when we wish to deny two things are really comparable

Speculating

In 50 years' time I worry that sea levels will have risen quite a bit and Hong Kong will have all sorts of sea walls and precautions. We will be very nervous when there are typhoons and everyone will evacuate the low-lying coastal areas. If I am right, it won't be much fun.

Features to note:

- a Use of modal verb 'will' for future reference
- b Use of words/expressions such as: 'predict', 'forecast', 'worst case scenario', 'if the present trend continues', 'looking into my crystal ball', 'short-term', 'distant future', 'bleak outlook', 'rosy outlook', 'bright future', 'prospect', 'mists of time', 'optimistic', 'pessimistic'

Hoping

I hope my studies will help to make me a better teacher with more ideas for interesting lessons for my students. Then I hope the school will see I am a good teacher and gradually give me more responsibility, as I hope to advance my career.

Features to note:

- a Verb 'hope' followed by the modal auxiliary 'will' or *to*-infinitive
- b Common error to avoid: confusing 'hope' and 'wish'

Wishing

I wish we could solve the energy problem. Our whole way of life depends on energy. Hong Kong just couldn't exist without lifts and hundreds of buses. Our climate is so hot and humid, air-conditioning is a joy. We need a lot of power but we know burning fossil fuels causes pollution. Nuclear power has its own problems and dangers. So I wish we could invent a way of getting clean energy from, say the sun, and stop damaging our planet.

Features to note:

- a Wishes expressed with modal verbs
- b Words/expressions such as: 'dream', 'heartfelt', 'ardent', 'yearn for'

Self-correcting

I think the Chief Executive could – sorry, what I mean to say is – the Chief Executive should take the time to go out and meet the people as much as possible. It's very easy for leaders to become cut off from the public.

Features to note:

- a Apology for having confused listeners ('sorry, what I mean to say is')
- b Use of expressions such as:

Let me put that another way.

That wasn't very clear, was it?

Sorry, that's not what I meant.

Oh dear – the word's on the tip of my tongue but just won't come out.

Let me say that again.

I mean ...

That is ...

Activity 2.4

Make use of the questions below to practise some of the above functions.

Read the questions and choose two or three functions you can use when answering. Think about the vocabulary and structures you might want to use and then give your answers. Record your answers and listen to yourself to identify areas for improvement. When you have finished, check the feedback section at the end of the module for our ideas.

- 1 So you have travelled quite a lot in Southeast Asia. Where would you recommend for visitors?
- 2 Does music play much of a role in your life?
- 3 Do you look forward to old age?
- 4 Are there any parts of Hong Kong you really do not like?
- 5 How often do you visit the cinema?

- 6 Can you describe your daily routine?
 - 7 Do you overuse your mobile phone?
 - 8 How did you spend last weekend?
 - 9 Do you think young people spend too much time on the computer?
 - 10 Do you feel safe in Hong Kong?
-

Information structures

We have looked at specific features associated with certain speech functions. We conclude this discussion by looking briefly at five common patterns which apply to spoken and written texts generally:

- problem–solution
- cause and effect
- sequential
- comparison
- analysis.

These information structures can provide you with ways of organizing what you want to say and some common language for expressing your point of view. Perhaps the most common of these structures is the problem–solution structure. Let's look first at an example. The speaker in the extract below is discussing young people. Can you identify the problem and solution in what he says?

Read the extract and decide where you could insert the phrases 'The problem is that ...' and 'The solution to the problem is ...':

Young people often feel insecure and lacking in self-confidence. Rejecting their parents' lifestyle and taking up smoking help them to overcome these feelings. Smoking also brings physical satisfaction. Neither method of overcoming insecurity is healthy psychologically or physically. Children who rebel against their parents may experience alienation; smoking is a known cause of numerous fatal diseases. We need to educate parents in ways of helping their children to avoid reaching the crisis point when these unhealthy options would be chosen.

I hope you'll agree that the two phrases could be inserted as follows:

The problem is that neither method of overcoming insecurity is healthy ...

and

The solution to the problem is to educate parents in ways ...

As you can see from the example, the language of problem–solution structures may not include the two explicit problem–solution phrases we just worked with. More common features of these structures are that:

- 1 negative aspects of the topic are identified and listed; and
- 2 a solution is proposed using modal verbs.

In the extract above the *negative aspects* are signalled by negative words:

insecure
 lacking
 rejecting
 (un)healthy psychologically
 (un)healthy physically
 alienation
 fatal diseases

The solution is proposed using the verb 'need':

We *need* to educate parents ...

The table below gives further examples of the kind of language you can use when you use the problem–solution structure or one of the other four information structures, and procedures for using these structures.

	Procedures	Language items
Problem–solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argue that there is a problem. Explain the problem. Give proof of the problem. Give a specific way to solve the problem. Give proof that the solution will work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'The problem/difficulty/issue is that ...' Modal verbs: 'must', 'should', 'could', 'need to'
Cause and effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start with a statement outlining your view, e.g. 'The Internet is a threat to the future of shops'. Don't mix up causes and effects: 'Why this happened' = cause; 'X happened because of Y' = effect. Use evidence to strengthen your points. Moderate unclear causes by phrases such as: 'it seems likely that ...' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Causes: 'because', 'due to', 'one cause is', 'another is', 'since', 'for', 'first', 'second' Effects: 'consequently', 'as a result', 'thus', 'resulted in', 'one result is', 'another is', 'therefore'

Sequential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State the number of points you are going to make. Work through the points one by one <i>marking</i> each with an adverb such as 'first', 'second', etc. 	'first', 'second', 'third', 'finally' 'then', 'next', 'after that', 'later', 'in the end'	
Comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole-to-whole – say everything about one thing, then everything about the other thing. Similarities-to-differences – explain the similarities between two things and then the differences. Point-by-point – explain one point of comparison before moving on to the next. 	Comparing: 'like', 'same as', 'more', 'similar', 'likewise', 'and', 'as well as', 'also', 'too', 'just as', 'as do', 'as did', 'as does', 'both'	Contrasting: 'unlike', 'in contrast to', 'different from', 'less', 'whereas', 'however', 'but', 'as opposed to', 'on the other hand'
Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start with a definition of terms. Identify the elements and characteristics of the terms to establish criteria. Apply the criteria to analyse the issue. 	'It depends what we mean by ...' 'I would define X as ...' 'If we apply this to X, we find that ...' 'Therefore ...' 'This suggests that ...'	



Activity 2.5

We have outlined above some of the features of these five information structures and some of the language items commonly used for each.

On Audio CD 1 track 2, you will hear five people responding to questions in an interview test of spoken English. Each speaker selects a different structure to organize his or her response, as shown in the following table.

	Question	Structure of response
1	Do you agree modern telecommunications create a threat to our freedom?	Problem–solution
2	Can people of different racial and cultural backgrounds live together in one country?	Comparison
3	Do shops have a future when we can buy things over the Internet?	Cause-and-effect
4	At what age do you think it is best for children to begin their formal education?	Analysis
5	Should parents be allowed to hit their children?	Sequential

You will find that the five speakers are more indirect in their use of the information structures. Listen to the recording and read the transcripts below. As you do so, try to identify the elements of the five different approaches to the structuring of information. When you have finished, look at the analysis provided in the feedback section at the end of the module.

As a follow-up activity, you might like to try inserting some of the language items introduced above into the transcripts to make the five structures more explicit.

- 1 Do you agree modern telecommunications create a threat to our freedom?

Modern telecommunications systems are easy to monitor and eavesdrop on. We all know from the news that terrorists are caught by governments reading their email, listening in on their phone calls, tracing their whereabouts from their cell-phone use and so on. This can happen to any of us. For example, every website we visit is recorded somewhere. Employers can in many cases check on their employees' activities very easily by means of access to their computers. I have even heard of salesmen outside the office being traced by their phones. All this is a considerable threat to our freedom, but, of course, we are not going to give up modern systems just for this reason. We need strong, clear and enforced laws to make sure that abuses are not allowed and are punished.

- 2 Can people of different racial and cultural backgrounds live together in one country?

I have relatives in Canada – my sister actually – and I visit her whenever I can. She lives in Calgary and the street where she lives is a wonderful example of multi-culturalism. I can't tell you how many ethnic and cultural groups are represented but there are certainly Chinese of a few different varieties, Poles, Italians, Indians and Lebanese as well as Canadians whose ancestors came from Britain. Everyone lives together in a spirit of friendship and cooperation.

However, sadly, I can easily think of other places where it's quite different. Palestinians and Israelis, Muslims and Hindus, Indonesians and Chinese, black and white, the different groups in the Balkans – look at those cases and you'll despair. But Canada shows it doesn't have to be like that. Living together is difficult but in the right circumstances it can be done.

3 Do shops have a future when we can buy things over the Internet?

It's very easy to buy items over the Internet. I use it more and more. I, like many people, began with books on Amazon and gradually moved on to other things. I recently started using eBay and have found some fine bargains. Payment seems safe and the delivery services are good. And, of course, I live in Hong Kong, a city famous for its shops. I can imagine if I lived in a small town with limited shops, I would be using the Internet for a lot more of my purchases. Some shops will survive – people like going and looking at the goods they are going to buy and shopping is an enjoyable social occasion, but I think there will be fewer and fewer shops as we realize we can get cheaper goods from anywhere in the world with just the click of a mouse. A retail revolution is on the way.

4 At what age do you think it's best for children to begin their formal education?

Well, I note the question says 'formal education', so I cannot just say a child's education starts from birth, but I still think the term is a little vague. If I sit with a child and read a book with her, is that 'formal education'? If the main feature is that the education is carried out outside the home by teachers, then there are still different types of 'formal education'. I am making these distinctions not in order to be awkward, but because I believe that a child's social education in the formal sense should begin early. At home, especially with the small families of today, the child is the centre of attention. I think learning to be one of a group and not expecting to be in the spotlight all the time is important. So I support early education for children, in other words going to kindergarten. But I do not believe children at that age should try to learn maths or do homework. They should play and make friends. It is formal education of a sort but not sitting at a desk and learning from a book.

5 Should parents be allowed to hit their children?

I'd like to make three points about this. First, I do not buy the argument that violence necessarily breeds violence and that by not hitting children we can break out of a circle of violence and move towards a more civilized society. The younger generation in the West was basically brought up without corporal punishment, but I don't hear evidence that violence has dramatically decreased. Second, I'm very nervous about the state telling parents how to bring up their children. I'm not sure this is the government's role. Adults should surely make their own decisions. My third point moves in a different

direction. I certainly support laws to prevent child abuse. Brutal beatings leaving bruises cannot be permitted. Parents like everyone else need to exercise moderation.

Activity 2.6

Look at the following questions taken from interview tests of spoken English. Think about how you would structure your response to each question. For each question, choose one of the five information structures introduced in this module and practise giving a two-minute response.

- 1 Can young people's idolization of their favourite singers be a good thing?
 - 2 How has the mobile phone affected the behaviour of Hong Kong people?
 - 3 Should residents of high-rise buildings, private or public, be allowed to keep pets?
-

The sounds of English

Clear and correct speech involves good standard pronunciation and appropriate intonation. If you think of the sounds the human voice can make as a long line, the line can be divided up in many different ways. Each language divides up the line differently and selects a different assortment of sounds. Once learned in childhood, the selection of sounds your first language gives you becomes deeply ingrained. It is difficult after childhood to gain control of the sound system of a different language. Unfortunately, even if people have good control of the grammar of a language, it is difficult for others to understand them if they do not produce the right sort of sounds. For example, to Japanese ears it may make little or no difference if you say 'rice' or 'lice'; but to the native-speaker listener, it makes the difference between a pleasant food and an unpleasant insect. Also, the Chinese speaker of English may find it difficult to distinguish between the vowels in 'ship' and 'sheep' or 'brick' and 'break', and misunderstandings can easily follow from this confusion. A good learner of English needs to make an effort to master the sounds of the language.

By world standards, English uses rather a lot of sounds, certainly far more sounds than there are letters in the alphabet. This means that you really need to use the phonetic alphabet in order to understand the differences between sounds. Since this module only aims to provide a brief refresher course in the key elements of pronunciation, we will not be using the phonetic alphabet. You are, however, strongly recommended to look at the phonetic symbols at the start of any good dictionary and to practise the sounds you find there.

Consonants

English has 24 consonant sounds. They are all made by controlling the flow of air with some part of the vocal system. The major types of consonants are termed *plosives*, *nasals* and *fricatives*. Plosives are 'explosive' in nature – air is trapped and suddenly released. For example, *p* and *b* are made by air being dammed up behind the lips before being released; for *t* and *d* the air is trapped by the tongue against the back of the front teeth near the roof of the mouth. The full set of plosives is as follows:

<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>g</i>
----------	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

For the nasal sounds, the air escapes through the nose:

<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ng</i>
----------	----------	-----------

The *ng* sound is the one you hear at the end of the word 'thing'.

The fricatives, as the name suggests, involve friction. They are:

<i>f</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>sh</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>h</i>
----------	----------	-----------	----------	----------	----------

as well as the more difficult ones:

<i>jz</i>	The sound you hear in the middle of the word 'measure'
<i>th</i>	The sound you hear at the beginning of the word 'thanks'
<i>th</i>	The sound you hear at the beginning of the word 'than'

Two fricative sounds are rather different because the air is trapped as in a plosive:

<i>ch</i>	<i>j</i>	The <i>j</i> sound is the one you hear at the beginning of the word 'jam'.
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This leaves three sounds:

<i>w</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>y</i>	The <i>y</i> sound is the one you hear at the beginning of the word 'usual'.
----------	----------	----------	--

Practise saying them. Which ones are unlike your first language? Those probably need the most attention.

Activity 2.7

Listen to the sentences on Audio CD 1 track 3 and underline the word you hear in each sentence:



- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1 pin/bin | 11 rise/rice |
| 2 saw/sore | 12 hall/horn |
| 3 shame/same | 13 light/night |
| 4 minute/mint | 14 three/free |
| 5 teas/trees | 15 sew/show |
| 6 arch/ark | 16 fought/thought |
| 7 pill/pin | 17 thirteen/thirty |
| 8 van/fan | 18 try/die |
| 9 vet/wet | 19 help/hell |
| 10 clothes/close | 20 bought/bored |

You can find the answers in the feedback section at the end of the module.

Vowels

Vowels are sounds we can make with our mouths open. The positions of the tongue and lips then create the different vowels and diphthongs (combinations of two or more vowels). The vowels are illustrated below in the context of words. Where there is more than one vowel in a word, the intended form has been italicized.

east, key, sea	foot, look, wood	buy, cry, light
bin, lip, still	few, rule, zoo	boy, boil, oyster
head, met, spell	but, some, tough	bay, eight, state
act, cat, man	<i>ago</i> , colour, waiter	oh, old, pole
are, bar, calm	burn, first, stir	doubt, how, loud
on, stop, want	beer, ear, here	
for, law, or	care, chair, prayer	

Pronounce the words. Can you hear the differences? Are you aware of doing different things with your mouth when you make the different sounds? If you cannot and are not, these are vowels you need to practise.



Activity 2.8

Listen to Audio CD 1 track 4 to hear the list above. After listening a few times, repeat the words after the recording. Finally, make your own recording of the list, compare your pronunciation with that of the original recording, and then try to improve your own efforts.



Activity 2.9

Listen to Audio CD 1 track 5 and underline the word you hear:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| 1 brick/break | 11 far/fur |
| 2 slip/sleep | 12 fur/four |
| 3 ship/sheep | 13 stir/star |
| 4 fill/feel | 14 palm/perm |
| 5 bean/bin | 15 calm/came |
| 6 day/dye | 16 birth/bath |
| 7 sigh/see | 17 part/port |
| 8 had/hid | 18 dot/doubt |
| 9 cat/cart | 19 hot/hurt |
| 10 panting/painting | 20 bar/bore |

21 pull/pill	31 bit/beat
22 fate/fight	32 cute/caught
23 rule/role	33 deer/door
24 root/rat	34 here/higher
25 route/rate	35 chairs/chores
26 soup/soap	36 layer/liar
27 but/boat	37 buy/bay
28 store/stir	38 tyres/tears
29 bird/board	39 fly/flea
30 bit/bet	40 roast/rust

You can find the answers in the feedback section at the end of the module.

Activity 2.10

Do the same activity with a friend, as follows:

- Choose 20 pairs of words you would like to work on.
- Write a new list containing only the 20 pairs of words.
- For each pair, write a sentence using one of the words.
- Record the 20 sentences and give the list of pairs to a friend.
- Ask your friend to listen to your recording and underline the word that he/she hears in each pair.

How successfully your friend does the exercise will tell you how clear your pronunciation is. Work on the sounds your friend has trouble identifying.

Potential problems

Here are some sounds that Cantonese speakers often have trouble with.

Consonants (in general)

- *v* as in ‘very’: The *v* sound is frequently mispronounced as a *w* or an *f*. Mispronunciation can make a meaning difference as in ‘very’/‘ferry’ and ‘vie’/‘why’, so it is worth some attention. Make sure the top teeth actually move across the lower lip as you make this sound; otherwise you will be producing a *w* instead of a *v*.
- *sh* as in ‘she’: The *sh* sound is often confused with *s* and *z*. Work on the three words ‘Sue’, ‘shoe’ and ‘zoo’. Make sure they sound

different and distinct. It is the position of the tongue which makes the difference between *s* and *sh*. Try to feel the difference as you pronounce each sound.

- *th* as in 'thin' and 'these': There are three sounds to keep apart here – the two different *th* sounds and *f*. Work on 'thin' and 'fin', 'three' and 'free', 'than' and 'fan', 'those' and 'foes'. The tongue comes forward and into contact with the teeth for the *th* sounds.
- *l* and *n*: These sounds are often confused at the start of words. Work on 'let' and 'net', 'light' and 'night'.
- *r* as in 'red': The *r* sound does not come naturally to Cantonese speakers and needs attention. Work on 'light' and 'right'. For the *r*, the tongue curls back just under the roof of the mouth.
- *l* and *r*: These sounds also cause trouble when they appear with other letters at the start of words. Work on 'play' and 'pray', 'bled' and 'bread', 'clean' and 'cream'.



Activity 2.11

Listen to the words discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 6. After you have listened a few times, repeat the words after the speakers.

Final consonants

When sounds like *t*, *d*, *k* and *p* (plosive sounds) occur at the end of a word, they are not 'released' in Cantonese. When this habit is transferred to English it results in what is known as *clipped speech* – that is, when the final sound is *t*, *k*, *d* or *p*, the ends of the words are clipped off. This is particularly noticeable when there is a vowel sound immediately following, because normally there would be a link up between the final sound and the vowel. Look at the four examples below:

I bought a lot of meat in the market.

I didn't visit a department store.

Look at the desk. It's been damaged.

I did a lot of work last night.



Activity 2.12

Listen to the four sentences discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 7. After you have listened a few times, repeat the sentences after the speakers, paying particular attention to the connections linking words together. Record them yourself and then listen for any problems. In

your day-to-day listening to English, see how many other examples of linking you can identify.

Past tense endings

The cutting off of endings is especially problematic when it involves past tense endings. Not pronouncing these clearly can create serious misunderstandings.

Some learners find the large number of consonants being pronounced together too much of a challenge and add extra vowels between the word ending and the past tense marker producing a sound like: *lovdid*, *walkdid* or *triedid* (for ‘loved’, ‘walked’ and ‘tried’).

Rules for forming past tenses

To explain the rules we have to use terms from phonetics. Verbs that end in a *voiceless* sound form a *t* past tense ending. Words that end in a *voiced* sound form a *d* ending. A simple test of whether a sound is voiced or voiceless is to pronounce the sound while placing your hand gently on your throat. If you can feel a vibration in the vocal chords when you pronounce the word, it is voiced. If there is no vibration, the sound is voiceless.

Voiceless	Voiced
<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>
<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>k</i>	<i>g</i>
<i>f</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>th</i> (‘birth’)	<i>th</i> (‘than’)
<i>s</i>	<i>z</i>
<i>sh</i>	<i>jz</i>
<i>h</i>	
<i>ch</i>	<i>j</i>
	<i>m</i>
	<i>n</i>
	<i>l</i>
	<i>r</i>
	<i>y</i>
	<i>w</i>
	all vowels

Hence, we have ‘stopped’ (which sounds like *stopT*), ‘talked’ (which sounds like *talkT*), ‘rushed’ (which sounds like *rushT*), and ‘watched’ (which sounds like *watchT*), but ‘robbed’ sounds like *robD*, ‘enslaved’

sounds like *enslavD*, ‘slammed’ sounds like *slamD*, ‘rowed’ like *rowD*, ‘tried’ like *tryD*.

An extra point to note:

When the verb already ends in a *t* or *d* sound, an additional *t* or *d* sound added to it would make no difference. Therefore an extra short vowel – *i* – is inserted before the past tense ending in these cases. Hence we have *expectID*, *inspectID*, *hatID*, *needID*, *endID* and so on.



Activity 2.13

Listen to the words discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 8. Pronounce them yourself. Make a recording of your attempts and then listen for any problems.



Activity 2.14

Pronounce the past tense forms of these verbs:

- | | |
|---------|-------------|
| 1 rub | 11 arrange |
| 2 reach | 12 swallow |
| 3 fold | 13 hope |
| 4 die | 14 purr |
| 5 agree | 15 pass |
| 6 laugh | 16 dash |
| 7 hug | 17 contract |
| 8 sack | 18 breathe |
| 9 pull | 19 wave |
| 10 calm | 20 box |

Listen to Audio CD 1 track 9 to hear if you were correct.

Final s

Cantonese words do not end in *s* sounds and Cantonese speakers of English seem to avoid final *s* sounds. This is unfortunate as English loves to end a word with *s*, sometimes naturally (‘premises’), sometimes because it is a third person present tense verb ending (‘goes’), sometimes because it is the possessive (‘May’s’) and sometimes because it’s a plural (‘shoes’).^{*} In fact, if you don’t make a lot of *s* sounds, it doesn’t sound as if you are speaking English. Try to make sure you make those sounds loud and clear.

- * Not all these written esses, of course, are actually esses; many are zeds. Again the rule is a phonetic one. Words that end in a voiceless sound need *s*, and words that end in a voiced sound need *z*. As we saw earlier, *p*, *t* and *k* are voiceless while *b*, *d* and *g* are voiced. Hence: *lipS*, *lotS*, *kickS*, etc., and *robZ*, *maidZ*, *dogZ*, etc.

An extra point to be noted: as with the past tense endings, if we add an *s* or *z* to any of *s/z/sh* and *jz*, the ending will not be heard. To solve this, an extra vowel – *i* – is added. A vowel is voiced, so all the plurals have a *z*:

busIZ, *buzzIZ*, *bushIZ*, *judgIZ*.

Activity 2.15

Listen to the words discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 10. After you have listened a few times, repeat the words after the speaker, paying particular attention to the pronunciation of the *s* and *z* sounds. Record them yourself and then listen for any problems. In your day-to-day listening to English, spend some time focusing on this aspect of pronunciation and see how many further examples you can identify.



Activity 2.16

Look at the list of words below. Add a final *s* sound to each word. You need to decide whether the *s* should be pronounced *s*, *z*, *IS*, or *IZ*. When you have decided, practise saying the words together with the final *s* ending. Then, listen to Audio CD 1 track 11 to check your answers and look at our comments in the feedback section at the end of the module:



- | | |
|---------|--------------|
| 1 sum | 6 Bob |
| 2 piano | 7 kick |
| 3 miss | 8 television |
| 4 catch | 9 day |
| 5 last | 10 jump |
-

Vowels (in general)

Long/short vowels

The difference in the quality and length of a vowel is important in English. Differences in the quality of vowel sounds result from differences in the height and shape of the tongue. For example the difference between the three vowels *i* (as in 'ill'), *e* (as in 'egg') and *a* (as in 'apple') results from differences in the height of the tongue. If you say them rapidly in succession, you may be able to feel the tongue moving

from a higher to a lower position. However, it takes a lot of training to be able to control the tongue, so mastery of all the various differences between vowel sounds is really a question of careful listening and imitation. Differences in the length of a vowel are easier to control and master.

A few simple physical clues to vowel differences are given below:

- For the contrasting short and long vowels in ‘ship’ and ‘sheep’, the mouth is more relaxed when producing the first, shorter sound.
- For the contrasting vowels in ‘set’ and ‘sat’, the jaw is lower for the second.
- For the vowels in ‘soup’ and ‘soap’, the mouth is more rounded for the first.
- For the contrasting long and short vowels in ‘short’ and ‘shot’, the mouth is more rounded for the first.

Reduced vowels

The vowels in unstressed syllables tend to get shorter. Most commonly they turn into the very common schwa (ə), the sound you make with your mouth slightly open and the tongue in the middle. This is the most common vowel in English. A short *i* sound may also result from vowel reduction.

Examples:

‘imaginary’ – ends əry

‘immediately’ – ends iətly

‘waiter’ – ends ər

‘a cup of tea’ – ə cup əv tea

‘Where’s the toilet?’ – thə toilət

The last one is very important. In front of consonants, the vowel in ‘the’ is a very light schwa. It sounds strange if the word is pronounced as a long *thur*. In front of vowels, the vowel in ‘the’ becomes the long *i* sound.

Examples:

the boy

the egg

I don’t want the egg.

Can I have the egg tart. It’s the last one?

Don’t eat on the lower deck please. Eating is allowed on the upper deck only.

Activity 2.17

Listen to the words, phrases and sentences discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 12. After listening a few times, repeat what the speaker says, paying particular attention to the vowel sounds. Record them yourself and then listen for any problems. Pay attention to the way vowels are used in other words in your day-to-day listening to English. Try to identify other examples and practise them.



Activity 2.18

The following words contain short vowels – the schwa ə and i. Identify them and pronounce them correctly:

- 1 illustration
- 2 package
- 3 permission
- 4 permanent
- 5 tentative

When you have tried pronouncing them yourself, listen to Audio CD 1 track 13 to check your answers. Finally, look in the feedback section for our comments when you have finished.



Stress

Words and word stress

When sounds are put together, they form words. When we consider the pronunciation of words of more than one syllable, we have to think about which syllable is emphasized more than the others. Every English word with more than one syllable carries stress – which is the opposite of reduction which we looked at in the last section. The stressed syllable is a little longer and louder than the others. There are a great many different stress patterns in longer, multi-syllable words, and the best thing one can do is to learn the stress as one learns the word, either by listening and copying or looking in a dictionary and seeing which syllable is marked for stress.

Here are some tendencies (there are too many exceptions to call them ‘rules’):

- two-syllable nouns – stress on first syllable (‘present’, ‘merit’, ‘nation’, ‘sister’)
- two-syllable adjectives – stress on first syllable (‘handsome’, ‘lovely’, ‘peaceful’, ‘random’)
- two-syllable verbs – stress on second syllable (‘present’, ‘inform’, ‘repay’, ‘withdraw’)
- words ending in *ion* – stress on the next to last syllable (‘caption’, ‘television’, ‘construction’)
- words ending in *cy*, *fy*, *gy*, *phy* and *ty*, and *al* stress on the syllable third from the end (‘democracy’, ‘magnify’, ‘biotechnology’, ‘photography’, ‘suitability’, ‘meteorological’)
- compound nouns – stress on the first part (‘blackboard’, ‘water bottle’, ‘classroom’)
- compound adjectives – formed with adjective and past participle – stress on the second part (‘hard-hearted’, ‘old-fashioned’, ‘wrong-headed’)
- compound verbs – stress on the second part (‘overrule’, ‘undercharge’, ‘download’)

Activity 2.19

Listen to the words discussed above on Audio CD 1 track

14. After listening a few times, repeat what the speaker says, paying particular attention to the stress used.

Record the words yourself and then listen for any problems. Pay attention to the way stress occurs in other words in your day-to-day listening to English and practise saying the words with the correct stress.

Activity 2.20

On which syllable does the stress fall in the following words?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 permit (noun) | 9 oblige |
| 2 gangster | 10 consume |
| 3 meaning | 11 constitution |
| 4 surface | 12 classify |
| 5 truthful | 13 physiology |
| 6 violent | 14 bad-tempered |
| 7 permit (verb) | 15 overlook |
| 8 repair (verb) | |

Check the feedback section at the end of the module for the correct answers. You can also hear the words on Audio CD 1 track 15. Listen to the recording and practise pronouncing the words with the correct stress.

Activity 2.21

On which syllable does the stress fall in the following words? No effort has been made to select words following the 'rules':

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 balance (noun) | 6 heighten |
| 2 balance (verb) | 7 electricity |
| 3 student council | 8 success |
| 4 employment | 9 murder (verb) |
| 5 hesitate | 10 preparation |

Check the feedback section at the end of the module for the correct answers. You can also hear the words on Audio CD 1 track 16. Listen to the recording and practise pronouncing the words with the correct stress.

Sentence stress

Stress is also needed at the clause or sentence level. Here stress depends on meaning. We place the stress on the most important piece of information we want to communicate:

Do you take EXERCISE?

No, I NEVER take exercise.

Do you have a GOOD DIET?

Yes, I eat a LOT of FRUIT and VEGETABLES.



Activity 2.22

Listen to Audio CD 1 track 17 to hear how word stress is used to emphasize these key words in the above sentences. After listening a few times, repeat what the speaker says, paying particular attention to the stress used. Record the words yourself, trying to imitate the speaker's emphasis, then listen for any problems. Pay attention to the way stress occurs for emphasis in your day-to-day listening to English and practise using stress for emphasis following the examples you hear.



Activity 2.23

Listen to Audio CD 1 track 18. Decide which question the speaker is answering:

- 1 a Who studies dentistry?
 b What does John study?
 c Is John a dentist?
- 2 a What symptoms does Ellen have?
 b Who's had a bad cough?
 c How long has she had the cough?
- 3 a What symptoms does Ellen have?
 b Who's had a bad cough?
 c How long has she had the cough?
- 4 a Did Richard have a headache last night?
 b When did Richard have a headache?
 c Was Richard ill last night?
- 5 a Who comes from Los Angeles?
 b Where does Melanie come from?
 c Does Melanie know anything about Los Angeles?

- 6 a How many sisters do you have?
- b Did you say you have three sisters?
- c Did you say you only have brothers?

Listen to the CD and underline the stressed words in the following sentences:

- 7 I think you ought to have the week-long acupuncture treatment.
- 8 The big drug companies aren't putting enough money into research for anti-malarial drugs.
- 9 Read the label and you'll see the product, despite its healthy name, is full of cholesterol.
- 10 SARS had one good effect: it made everyone do far more planning for health emergencies.

When you have finished, look in the feedback section and check your answers.

Intonation

To attempt to summarize a very complex area in simple terms, we can say that intonation is concerned with relative changes of pitch in a speaker's voice. Whether the pitch of a speaker's voice is level, goes up or goes down will communicate information about what he or she is saying. It may tell us that the speaker is interested in his or her topic, is questioning information or stating information with confidence. Intonation is an important aspect of speech as it conveys not only meaning but also attitude. The role of intonation in conveying attitude is important because people may react strongly when they perceive a negative attitude. A second language speaker can easily give the impression of being arrogant or rude simply because of an inability to use intonation appropriately.

In this section, we look at intonation in very broad terms, considering the meaning of rising and falling tones, the way intonation can change the meaning of a tag question and the way intonation functions in longer stretches of speech involving multiple tone units or groups.

Rising and falling tones

- In general the voice falls towards the end of a sentence when it is a statement, command or WH question:

I like pineapple. ↓

Get ready. ↓

Where's your medicine? ↓

- The voice rises if it is a yes–no question or a request. This can also suggest uncertainty:

Are you ready? ↑

Please close the door. ↑

You like bananas? ↑ (implying 'Do you like bananas?')



Activity 2.24

Listen to these sentences on Audio CD 1 track 19 and focus your attention on the way intonation is used to convey meaning. Try to imitate the speaker's pronunciation. Record yourself and compare yourself with the speaker in the recording.

Activity 2.25

Listen to the ten sentences below on Audio CD 1 track 20. Use arrows (↑↓) to indicate whether the speaker is using a rising or a falling tone:

- 1 How are you today?
- 2 I'm fine, thank you.
- 3 And you?
- 4 It looks like rain.
- 5 I forgot to bring an umbrella.
- 6 Didn't you read the forecast?
- 7 Why should I trust a forecast?
- 8 Get under my umbrella.
- 9 Under your umbrella?
- 10 There's room.

When you have finished, go to the feedback section at the end of the module to check your answers.

Tag questions

These are more common in speech than writing. Tag questions that imply agreement are rather like statements and have a falling tone:

You're tired, aren't you? ↓

Tag questions that seek information or express uncertainty have a rising tone:

You'll take more exercise, won't you? ↑

Practice is needed to form tag questions correctly using the appropriate auxiliary verb.

Activity 2.26

Listen to the sentences discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 21. After listening a few times, repeat after the speaker paying particular attention to the intonation of

the tag question. Record the sentences yourself and listen for any problems. Then go on to the next activity.



Activity 2.27

Add tag questions to these sentences:

- 1 Pass me the needle.
- 2 It's not very healthy.
- 3 She doesn't take enough exercise.
- 4 You wanted to try acupuncture.
- 5 You must try to eat less.
- 6 They believe in traditional herbal medicine.
- 7 The next flu pandemic will be terrible.
- 8 They had been trying to find a cure for a long time.
- 9 You aren't well.
- 10 You shouldn't smoke.

When you have finished, listen to the answers on the recording. Listen several times to each one and then practise repeating the sentences and question tags yourself. When you feel confident, record yourself and check for any problems by comparing your own recording with the recording on Audio CD 1 track 22.

Tone groups

Longer stretches of speech are divided up into tone groups, or tone units. These are intonation structures centred on the major stress in the utterance and the direction the voice takes in delivering that stressed syllable. This is another highly complex area in the study of intonation. However, from our understanding of the role of the tone group in intonation, we can draw some useful advice for speakers of English as a second language.

English words are not spoken one by one with spaces between them. This may suit some languages, but sounds mechanical and soulless in English. Chunks of speech need to be broken up into suitable groups of words depending on the sense and grammatical structure. There is not one

correct way to do this, but there are certainly natural and unnatural ways. Try reading aloud the following passage:

I'm lucky. I have always been a healthy person. Some of my family suffer from asthma, but I have no allergies or breathing problems. I'm a bit short-sighted, but nothing serious. I don't even seem to have many accidents – touch wood. I have never broken a bone or anything like that.

Here is the passage divided into tone groups:

I'm lucky. / I have always been a healthy person. / Some of my family / suffer from asthma, / but I have no allergies / or breathing problems. / I'm a bit short-sighted, / but nothing serious. / I don't even seem to have many accidents / – touch wood. / I have never broken a bone / or anything like that.

Activity 2.28

Listen to the passage discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 23. After listening several times and noting the way the passage is divided into tone groups, practise reading the passage yourself in the same way. When you feel confident, record it yourself and listen for any problems by comparing your own recording with the recording for the activity.



Activity 2.29

Read the conversation below. Break it up into tone groups. Practise reading it several times and decide where the tone groups are. Listen to Audio CD 1 track 24 to see if your version is in general agreement with it. Then look in the feedback section for our tone group markings. Finally, practise reading the conversation aloud with the same tone groups:



Student: May I ask you a few questions about my medical rights while in the UK?

Adviser: Yes, please go ahead.

Student: Basically, I'm worried about cost. What can I get free of charge?

Adviser: Well, you are a student with a proper student visa, so you are entitled to free health care. That includes visits to a doctor

and hospital treatment, but you do have to pay something towards the cost of prescriptions and dental and optical care.

Student: And does the hospital treatment also cover accidents?

Adviser: Oh yes. Any visitor to the UK gets free emergency treatment.



Activity 2.30

Read the speech below. Break it up into tone groups. Practise reading it several times and decide where the tone groups are. Listen to Audio CD 1 track 25 to see if your version is in general agreement with it.

Then look in the feedback section for our tone group markings.

Finally, practise reading it in the same way:

I think I ought to say a few words about the common cold, as I am afraid to say that most of you are going to experience it. It is a very common virus here in Britain and almost everyone gets at least one cold during the winter. Most people when they do get one do not go to the doctor and as it is viral you certainly do not need antibiotics. If you feel bad or think you are very infectious you might want to spend a day or two in bed, but most people struggle on in spite of their colds. Colds or some of their symptoms can last a long time and come frequently, so you can't let them take over your life. We recommend you take extra rest, drink lots of fluids especially fruit juices, get throat tablets to soothe any soreness you feel and use a nasal spray to clear your air passages. If the cold gets worse or really won't go, then you need medical advice. Sorry to be the bearer of this depressing news, but forewarned is forearmed.

Suggestions for further work on intonation

As we have said, intonation is a complex but important aspect of English speech. Complete mastery of intonation is probably not possible for a learner of English as a second language, as intonation is something which is acquired in childhood. However, improving the control of appropriate intonation is possible with time and practice. The key is to listen attentively to the intonation of native-speakers and attempt to imitate what they say and the way they say it. Listen to as much English as you can. Switch on the BBC for example, or ABC or CNN, download their broadcasts to your MP3 player, listen to them repeatedly and try to imitate short stretches of what they say.

Creating a good impression

You will often find yourself in a situation where what you say and the way you say it will have important consequences for your future. A job interview is just such a situation; another is a test of spoken English. In a test situation, your grammatical accuracy and fluency are being evaluated. However, this evaluation may be affected by two factors: how appropriately you select your words, and how clearly you deliver them.

Register

'Register' is a technical term referring to the degree of formality appropriate for different situations. A test of spoken English is a fairly formal affair. While you should speak in a relaxed manner, using any idioms you find appropriate and the normal contractions of spoken English ('I'm', 'he's', 'there're' and so on), you should avoid the latest slang, words that people might find offensive, and very casual forms ('ya know', 'dunno', 'kinda', 'sorta', 'gotta', 'wanna', 'lemme', 'gimme', 'lotta', 'coz').

Useful phrases:

Sorry, could you ask that again?

Sorry, I don't really understand.

Sorry, let me say that again.

I'm not sure, but ...

That's hard to say, but let me try.

Let me think about that for a second. Well, ...

I am not sure I know why, but ...

Let me see, I think ...

Activity 2.31

Listen to the phrases discussed above on Audio CD 1 track 26. After listening a few times, repeat after the speaker paying particular attention to pronunciation and intonation. Record the sentences yourself and listen for any problems by comparing your own recording with the recording for the activity.



Clarity

It seems obvious, but we had better say it. If the examiner cannot hear you in an oral examination, you will not do very well. Some people are soft-spoken. Many people are shy. However, in an oral examination they

must make an effort. Do not shout or be strange, but ensure that your answers are loud enough to be heard without difficulty. You can soon see if the examiner is straining to hear you, leaning forward and turning an ear towards you. If so, speak louder. Do not put your hand over your mouth in any circumstances. Speaking too slowly disturbs the impression of fluency.

Activity 2.32

Record yourself speaking. Give answers to the following questions:

- What illnesses or health problems are most common in Hong Kong?
- How has health care changed in Hong Kong in the last 20 years?
- Should free health care be provided by the government? Give reasons for your answer.
- What role does education play in improving health care and public health?
- Do you agree with the idea that our grandchildren will be healthier than us? Give reasons for your answer.
- In what ways do you expect health care to improve and develop in the next 20 years?

Listen to your recording and try to detect your weaknesses. Ask friends to listen and give you their honest opinion. Take active steps to improve the weaknesses you identify.

Conclusion

In this module we have revised many of the basic features of English speech.

We have covered the following:

- the structure of conversational interaction with particular emphasis on turn-taking;
- the role of interjections in contributing to the flow of conversation;
- the role of hesitation devices in providing thinking time;
- the characteristics of important speech functions and common organizational structures;
- the consonants and vowels of English;
- problems native-speakers of Cantonese might have with these sounds;
- rules for the pronunciation of past-tense endings and the common ending *s*;
- the reduction of unstressed vowels;
- stress at word and sentence level;
- common intonation patterns;
- tag questions;
- tone groups; and
- how to create a good impression through appropriate register and clarity of speech.

You have also done activities to help reinforce these points.