

IMPROVING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION SKILL THROUGH PHONETIC TRAINING FROM WEB-BASED MATERIALS

NÂNG CAO KHẢ NĂNG PHÁT ÂM TIẾNG ANH THÔNG QUA VIỆC LUYỆN TẬP TỪ NGUỒN HỌC LIỆU TRỰC TUYẾN

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Abstract: The research aims to investigate the effectiveness of using web-based materials in developing English pronunciation skills of non-English major sophomores at the University of Economics-Technology for Industries (UNETI). This research endorsed a semi-experimental design. The research participants were divided into two groups: the control group (N=20) and the experimental group (N=20). To collect data, an oral EFL pronunciation test recorded in video or audio was performed before and after for both groups. The obtained data was analyzed using Microsoft Office 365 Excel. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in favor of the experimental group. Web-based materials are effective in developing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pronunciation skills for non-English major sophomores at the University of Economics-Technology for Industries (UNETI) because it includes materials that are intended to increase student engagement and interaction and provide them with more exposure to the target language, which has helped improve their EFL pronunciation. Based on the research findings, both the theoretical and practical aspects of EFL pronunciation should be taught side by side in an integrated manner; the practical part is not separate from the theory part.

Keywords: English pronunciation skill, the web-based materials, quasi-experimental design.

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích nghiên cứu hiệu quả của việc luyện tập phát âm tiếng Anh thông qua việc sử dụng nguồn tài liệu trực tuyến để phát triển kỹ năng phát âm tiếng Anh cho sinh viên năm 2 không chuyên ngữ của Trường Đại học Kinh tế - Kỹ thuật Công nghiệp. Nghiên cứu đã áp dụng phương pháp thiết kế bán thực nghiệm. Những người tham gia nghiên cứu được chia thành hai nhóm: nhóm kiểm soát (N=20) và nhóm thử nghiệm (N=20). Để thu thập dữ liệu, bài kiểm tra phát âm EFL đã được thực hiện trước và sau nghiên cứu cho cả hai nhóm. Dữ liệu thu được được phân tích bằng Microsoft Office 365 Excel. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy sự khác biệt có ý nghĩa thống kê giữa điểm trung bình của hai nhóm. Kết quả của nhóm thử nghiệm cao hơn so với nhóm kiểm soát, điều này khẳng định luyện tập phát âm thông qua nguồn học liệu trực tuyến có hiệu quả hơn trong phát triển cách phát âm tiếng Anh của sinh viên năm 2 hệ không chuyên ngữ tại Trường Đại học Kinh tế - Kỹ thuật Công nghiệp vì nó bao gồm các tài liệu có mục đích giúp tăng khả năng phát âm của sinh viên tham gia nghiên cứu và nó cung cấp cho người học nhiều cơ hội tiếp xúc với ngôn ngữ đích.

Từ khóa: Phát âm tiếng Anh, tài liệu trực tuyến, thiết kế bán thực nghiệm.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. General Introduction

English pronunciation is the meaningful perception and production of sounds. Both

speakers and listeners need clear pronunciation as it facilitates oral communication. Pronunciation is vital to proper communication because the incorrect

use of pronunciation inevitably leads to the message being misunderstood by the recipient. Pronunciation of the letter sounds in words as well as syllable emphasis on parts of words will more often than not change the words meaning and context drastically thereby irreversibly altering the meaning of the sentence being communicated. For effective and successful communication in English, pronunciation skills are key which impacts other linguistic skills. To elaborate, pronunciation skills help in the development of learners' speaking skills. According to studies on English as a second language reading, reading difficulties emerged as a consequence of inaccurate pronunciation of English sounds. Assisting these learners in improving their pronunciation may therefore help them to become more effective readers. The major goal which is considered relevant and achievable for pronunciation teaching and learning is to achieve international intelligibility. Thus, modern approaches to pronunciation teaching aim to provide students or learners with the ability to interact successfully with English speakers from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. A variety of technologies and digital resources are now available to enhance pronunciation teaching, including computer-assisted pronunciation teaching (CAPT) and automated speech recognition (ASR). Therefore, in the current study, the researcher would like to discover the impact of web-based materials in improving EFL pronunciation.

1.2. Statement of the problem and rationale for the study

Although English teachers at UNETI are well aware of the importance of integrating pronunciation into the language classroom, they still find it formidable to teach it as

“there is no agreed-upon system of deciding what to teach, and when and how to do it” (Darcy, Ewert, & Lidster, 2012). The integrative approach imposes high demands on the design of pronunciation syllabi and lessons, which may also intimidate the teachers. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) proposes a communicative framework in which attention is gradually shifted from an initial focus on form towards incorporating more meaning in a sequence of activities, with the provision of corrective feedback. In addition, in a communicative classroom, the teacher should work as a pronunciation coach who assists learners by supplying information, giving models from time to time, offering suggestions and constructive feedback about performance, and providing practice opportunities and encouragement (Morley, 1991) but an English class at UNETI is rather crowded with 50 students at average. Before entering university, UNETI students in high schools mostly focused on preparing and doing English tests which prioritized grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension for the university entrance exam. The student's EFL process lacked the practice of Writing, Speaking, Listening skills, especially pronunciation. In the process of teaching, the researcher found that UNETI students have had poor pronunciation skills that encouraged the researcher to focus on studying how to develop their EFL pronunciation skills through web-based materials available on the Internet.

1.3. Research questions and research hypotheses of the study

The research was conducted to investigate the effectiveness in improving learners' pronunciation through web-based materials. To achieve this, the following research

question must be taken into serious consideration:

To what extent do web-based materials impact on non-English major sophomores' EFL pronunciation skills at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries?

What the research will find is stated in these alternative hypotheses:

(1) *There is a significant difference in the Experimental Group's EFL pronunciation before and after the treatment.*

(2) *The results of the Experimental Group's Post- EFL Pronunciation Test are higher than the ones of the Control Group's Post- EFL Pronunciation Test.*

(3) *The web-based materials are effective in developing EFL pronunciation skills among non-English major sophomores at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries.*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Pronunciation

2.1.1. Definition

According to E W Stevick (1978:145) pronunciation can be defined as: *"Pronunciation is the primary medium through which we bring our use of language to the attention of other people. It is a process of materializing of features relating to the system of sounds/ phonemes, the syllabic structure, prosody (word stress and intonation) while speech/ oral verbal message is constructed."*

2.1.2. The elements of pronunciation

(*) *Suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation Stress*

According to Collin, P (1985) who developed from the theory by Fry, D.B (1958), there are

various ways in which stress manifests itself in the speech stream, and they depend to some extent on which language is being spoken. Stressed syllables are often louder than non-stressed syllables, and they may have a higher or lower pitch. They may also sometimes be pronounced longer.

Intonation

Intonation, or change of pitch, is crucial in signaling speaker's meaning, particularly interpersonal attitudes. Pitch changes are crucially linked with stress.

Features of connected speech

In spoken discourse the boundaries between words are very often not clear-cut. Words and sounds are lost and linked together in different ways to enable us to articulate with minimal movement.

Voice quality

Voice quality has received little attention in EFL learning, although actors may be quite familiar with the concept.

(*) *Segmental aspects of pronunciation*

Consonant Sounds are those speech sounds for the production of which there is a sort of obstruction in the vocal tract. Crystal (2003) asserts that Consonants are "sounds made by a closure or narrowing in the vocal tract so that the airflow is either completely blocked, or so restricted that audible friction is produced" (P.103). *Vowel Sounds* are the speech sounds which are produced without any sort of obstruction in the vocal tract. They are the peaks of syllables. Crystal (2003) asserts that vowels are "sounds articulated without a complete closure in the mouth or a degree of narrowing which would produce audible friction" (P.517).

2.3. Web-based materials

2.3.1. Definition

According to Bates AW (1995),

Web-based means an external application that is accessed via a web browser over the Internet. A Web-based application refers to any program that is accessed over a network connection using HTTP, rather than existing within a device's memory. Web-based applications/ materials often run inside a Web browser.

2.3.2. Web-based teaching

"Web teaching is all about making connections: connecting your students to one another and to resources around the world; combining different materials – music, motion, text, narration – into one presentation; collecting related information from multiple sources enable students to make their own connections by offering materials for download and use in their scholarship or by having them construct web documents as part of their coursework. And this process of making meaningful connections is at the core of all learning." (Bates AW, 1995).

2.3.3. Web-based materials to teach and study English pronunciation

Due to space limitation, not all of these programs can be described in detail in this paper. The researcher focused on pronunciation lesson videos from YouTube, websites as www.blairenglish.com, www.soundsofenglish.com, www.shiporsheep.com, www.bbc.co.uk, www.testyourenglispronunciation.com, www.translate.google.com because they were free, diverse and arranged from easiness to difficulties. Especially, students can practice at any time.

2.4. Empirical Studies

A variety of studies analyzed the effect of web-based materials on developing English language skills. So as to have an overview of

different researches related to web-based material, some of them were reviewed. Anwari, Ktaviana, Rahmawati, & Syafiq (2021) investigated the effect of the web materials in improving the writing ability of students on descriptive text. The total samples for this research were all tenth-grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah kudu, Indonesia, which consisted of 70 students. Findings indicated that the use of web materials were effective in improving the students' writing skills of descriptive text. Fujianti and Sudirman's (2019) research investigated the effect of web materials to improve students' narrative writing. The sample consisted of 58 students from the second grade in Senior High School Pandeglang 11 in Indonesia, with 29 students in the experimental group and 29 students in the control group. The design of this research was a quasi-experimental design. The method used in this research was a quantitative method. The researcher used pre and post-test to collect data. The results showed that there was a significant effect of using the web materials toward students' writing mastery on the narrative text. Also, the web materials increased the motivation of students toward narrative writing. Some Vietnamese researchers explored the effect of web materials on teaching some different language skills. It is noticeable that Dao. D. (2018) did research on *"Significance of Teaching Speaking skill of English through web materials"* which conducted a quasi-experiment at Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City with 38 students. It can be easily seen from the test score analysis that the experimental group made great progress while the control group made little, and there is a significant difference in listening comprehension between two groups. Thus, it can be concluded that the researcher's study

emphasizes the effectiveness of web materials on other field of English language skill: pronunciation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research setting and participants

The study took place at UNETI from September 2022 to April 2023. The researchers chose sophomores randomly from Faculty of Business Administration, Financial Banking and Insurance, and Electronics Engineering. The second-year participants have already experienced a university entrance examination with a variety of tests. Consequently, they were supposed to have sufficient background knowledge and ability to pronounce and speak English.

Forty non-English major sophomores at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries in the Academic year 2022-2023 were selected to be the participants of the study. Among 40, 20 came from Faculty of Financial banking and Insurance, 10 from Faculty of Business Administration and the rest from Faculty of Electronics Engineering. Participants who were aged between 20 years old and 21 years old were divided equally at random into an experimental group and a control one, with 20 students in each group. Students' participation was appointed by the researcher and could withdraw from this study whenever they wanted. The researchers made sure that the participants' information would be confidential and the findings of this study would be informed to them.

3.2. Research design and methodology

To begin with, the quasi-experimental research was taken into consideration. According to McDonough J & McDonough S (1997), it is considered as a controlled look at nature. Selinger & Shohamy (2000) confirmed

that the quasi-experimental research is the effects of specified and controlled treatments given to subjects usually formed into groups. In a nutshell, the quasi-experimental research is carried out to explore the strength of relationship between variables. With this method, not only did researcher have firm control over variables to obtain results but they also could identify the confirmation of the hypothesis and further analyze this relationship to determine in-depth ideas. Thus, the study adopted a quasi-experimental design that aims to evaluate interventions but that do not use randomization and to demonstrate the effectiveness between an intervention and an outcome. The researcher also followed quantitative methodology in this study

3.3. Instruments

The instruments are comprised of two pronunciation tests administered as the pre-test and post-test which follows Vaughan-Rees (2010)'s instructions in "Test your pronunciation". Atabek Yiğit, E., Balkan Kıyıcı, F. & Çetinkaya, G. (2014) evaluated the test effect in the classroom. The findings indicated that the tests, which educational professionals frequently use to assess their students' learning, should be used to support teaching and learning processes and not just to determine the level of learning since much research supports the claim that testing has an important effect on students' retention of previously learned information. The pre-test would be given before treatment to measure the participants' pronunciation skills. The post-test was administered to measure the participants' pronunciation skills after the treatment. Both of them are carried out with 40 participants in class and then recorded in video or audio through smart phone. The test consisted of 3 parts:

- Part 1: Participants listen to 10 words in the audio file three times per word, say the word they hear twice.
- Part 2: Participants look at 10 words on TV screen, pronounce the words they see twice.
- Part 3: Participants look at 15 sentences on TV screen, pronounce them.

The validity of the tests was calculated through a rubric which is an assessment tool that clearly indicates achievement criteria across all the components of any kind of student work, from written to oral to visual. It can be used for marking assignments, class participation, or overall grades. There are two types of rubrics: qualitative and quantitative rubric (Audrey, 2011). The quantitative rubric model is designed in the research.

Table 1. Quantitative rubric model

Score	Pronunciation Description
35	<p>Excellent Pronunciation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Native-like pronunciation of individual sounds, word stress, word endings, intonation, and rhythm - Native-like fluency, speak smoothly without hesitation and with ease - Pronunciation does not impede communication
30	<p>Good Pronunciation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accurate pronunciation of individual sounds, word stress, word endings, intonation, and rhythm - Occasional non-native pauses and/or hesitations which do not interfere with comprehensibility - Pronunciation rarely impedes communication
25	<p>Satisfactory Pronunciation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fairly accurate pronunciation of individual sounds, word stress, word endings, intonation, and rhythm - Some non-native pauses and/or hesitations which sometimes interfere with comprehensibility - Pronunciation occasionally impedes communication

20	<p>Partially Effective Pronunciation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inaccurate pronunciation of individual sounds, word stress, word endings, intonation, and rhythm - Many non-native pauses and/or hesitations which can interfere with comprehensibility - Pronunciation impedes communication
10	<p>Ineffective Pronunciation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Major inaccuracies with pronunciation of individual sounds, word stress, word endings, intonation, and rhythm cause significant problems of intelligibility - Significant pausing, hesitations, and/ or short phrases which interfere significantly with comprehensibility - Pronunciation severely impedes communication
NS	No response

3.4. Data collection procedure

Some steps were experienced in the present study. At the first stage, a pre-test to measure the groups of participants' pronunciation skills before the treatment is performed. At the second stage, the researcher implemented the treatment which lasted 10 weeks for the experimental group. At the beginning of each session, the pronunciation lesson video from YouTube, websites as: www.blairenglish.com, www.soundsofenglish.com, www.shiporsheep.com, www.bbc.co.uk, www.testyourenglispronunciation.com which were free, diverse and arranged from easiness to difficulties were given to the experimental group to help recognizing the correct pronunciation, mouth shape and tongue placement. Next, the participants had to listen continuously for five (5) minutes, observe the mouth and sample sounds of the experts. Then, the researcher instructed them to pronounce it again and again until it is correct and enough. Right after the process of researcher's instruction, participants from the experimental group listened and repeated what had been heard. This technique will help

them keep up with the speaking speeds of native speakers. The audio or video type was recorded through smart phone. The next step is that the instructor gave participants time to go to the web page of Google Translate or go to the Google Translate App on the mobile phone and practice saying the word by pressing on the microphone icon. Do it until the word they want to say is written on the screen in text. Especially, they were required to study and practice at least 30 minutes at home. Regarding the control group, participants were taught and instructed to study and practice regularly based on the pronunciation program practice in the Market Leader 3rd Edition Elementary Coursebook (Cotton, D., Falvey, D. & Kent, S., 2000). They were required to study and practice at least 30 minutes at home as well. This group's practice was also recorded in audio or video through smart phone. The procedure continued for the remaining of the session. At the last stage, the post-test was run to measure the participants' pronunciation skills at the end of the treatment.

3.5. Data analysis

To analyze the collected data, Microsoft Office 365 Excel was used. Along with the descriptive statistics including: mean and standard deviation, quantitative rubric assessment utilized to measure the effects of web-based materials on the improvement of participants' pronunciation skills.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Groups' Pre-EFL Pronunciation Test

Reviewing literature related to EFL pronunciation, along with the researcher's teaching experience, it could be argued that non-English major sophomores at UNETI had weak EFL pronunciation skills. To assure the

validity of this argument, the researcher conducted pre-EFL pronunciation test involving experimental and control group. Results indicated in Table 2, prove their poor EFL pronunciation skills.

Table 2: Results of pronunciation problems

No	Skill	Percentage
1.	Performing similar consonants	41%
2.	Performing similar vowels	32.5%
3.	Performing right stress	21%
4.	Performing shift of stress	24.3%
5.	Performing linking	14.2%
6.	Performing elision	25%
7.	Uttering assimilation	9.8%

Through the results from Table 2, it can be seen that participants encountered huge problems with similar consonants and vowels, hence, recommendations should be mentioned further later.

Table 3: Results of Both Groups' Pre-EFL Pronunciation Test

Group	N	M	S.D.	D.F	t.value
Control	20	13.55	1.48	18	31.3
Experimental	20	13.45	1.62		

Table 3 showed the descriptive data of both groups for the pre-test. The mean and standard deviation for both groups is roughly similar in the pre-test. In the experimental group, the mean score is 13.25 (approximately 13.3) and the standard deviation is 1.77. In control group, the mean score is 13.85 (approximately 13.9) and the standard deviation is 1.57. It certified that there is similarity in both groups at the beginning of the treatment. There were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control one, t-value was 31.45 for both the control group and the experimental one. This indicates that the two groups had almost the same academic level at the beginning of the treatment. Thus, any possible improvement after the treatment could be attributed to the use of web-based materials.

4.2. Experimental Group' Pre-Post- EFL Pronunciation Test

Findings of the current study were reached in the light of examining the hypotheses of the study.

Hypothesis (1) There is a significant difference in the Experimental Group's EFL pronunciation before and after the treatment.

Table 4: Results of the Experimental Group's Pre-Post- EFL Pronunciation Test

Experimental	M	SD	t.value	D.f
Pre-	13.5	1.62	26.22	18
Post-	24	1.8		

Note: Significant at (0.05)

In the first hypothesis, it has been proposed that there would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group before and after the treatment. The number indicated from Table 4, in terms of the mean scores, changed from 13.25 to 25.5 that increased dramatically. It is proved that there was significant improvement in pronunciation skill through applying the WBM to the experimental group. Thus, the first hypothesis "There is a significant difference in the Experimental Group's EFL pronunciation before and after the treatment." was validated.

4.3. Groups' Pre-Post- EFL Pronunciation Test

Hypothesis (2) The results of the Experimental Group's Post- EFL Pronunciation Test are higher than the ones of the Control Group's Post- EFL Pronunciation Test.

Table 5: Results of both Groups' Pre-Post- EFL Pronunciation Tests

Group		M	SD	t.value	D.f
Pair 1	Control Pre-	13.6	1.48	31.3	18
	Control Post-	16.7	1.5	32.16	
Pair 2	Experimental Pre-	13.5	1.62	31.3	
	Experimental Post-	24	1.8	32.16	

Note: Significant at (0.05)

Table 5 presented the descriptive data of both groups for the pre-test and post-test. In the experimental group, the mean score of post-tests is 25.5 and the standard deviation is 1.91. In control group, the mean score of post-tests is 17.3 and the standard deviation is 1.55. The difference was significant at 0.05 level. The participants in the experimental group outperformed the participants in the control group. It can be understood that the results of the Experimental Group's Post- EFL Pronunciation Test are higher than the ones of the Control Group's Post- EFL Pronunciation Test. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed right from the results of the research. This improvement of the experimental group compared to the control group is due to using the web-based materials.

4.4. Total Effect Size of the web-based materials on EFL Pronunciation Skills

Hypothesis (3) The web-based materials are effective in developing EFL pronunciation skills among non-English major sophomores at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries.

Table 6: The Total Effect Size of the web-based materials on EFL Pronunciation Skills

Group		M	t.value	D.f	Effective size
Pair 1	Control Pre-	13.6	23.41	18	0.31
	Control Post-	16.7			
Pair 2	Experimental Pre-	13.5	26.22	18	0.63
	Experimental Post-	24			

Note. Significant at (0.05)

In the third hypothesis, it has been proposed that the web-based materials would be effective in developing EFL pronunciation skills among non-English major sophomores

at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries. Cohen's equation for effect size was used to examine this hypothesis as shown in Table 6.

4.5. Discussions

Concerning the results, the researcher indicated that the three hypotheses were confirmed. The first hypothesis referred that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group before and after the treatment in favor of the experimental one in the post-test of EFL pronunciation. This improvement of experimental group's performance could be attributed to many reasons related to the web-based materials. These reasons include providing participants of the experimental group with a variety of techniques/ steps, changing the methods of teaching, raising roles among the students to improve their EFL pronunciation skills. It could also be attributed to the fact of providing students with the opportunity to interact with native online materials, and how participants react to such the material presented to them. Thus, the first hypothesis proved to be correct. The results are in line with Anwari, Ktaviana, Rahmawati, & Syafiq (2021) which revealed the effects of the web materials of on self-efficacy in the writing of experimental group. Also, the second hypothesis indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the post-administrations of the experimental group and of the control one in favor of the experimental group. Throughout the teaching sessions, it was noticed that participants of the experimental group had a positive attitude towards the web-based materials. The use of web-based materials led to a higher level of improvement in students' language achievement and motivation; it

increased their attention and interest. Hence, their performance was improved which supported the second hypothesis. The experimental group's participants have changed the way they feel about EFL pronunciation skills. In the nutshell, the third hypothesis revealing that the web-based materials are effective in developing EFL pronunciation skills among non-English major sophomores at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries was made evident. *The results are congruent with those of Dao, D (2018) which showed that there were statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups in students' speaking performance, in favor of the experimental group due to the training from web materials.*

5. CONCLUSION

In terms of the achieved results, it could be concluded that the web-based materials were effective in improving EFL pronunciation skills among non-English major sophomores at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries as it included purposeful material utilizing authentic language that helped improving their performance of EFL pronunciation. It also incorporated both the theoretical part of teaching EFL pronunciation with the practical one which enhanced learners' performance. Furthermore, the improvement of the participants' EFL pronunciation could be attributed to the fact that the web-based materials included materials that helped participants be familiar with the confusing vowels and be able to identify and discriminate them. It also familiarized them with the proper intonation patterns of English language and enabled them to practice such patterns in different contexts which increased their

comprehensibility and intelligibility. The research results have made three hypotheses absolutely obvious that is the answers to the research questions the author raise at the beginning.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations could be mentioned as follows. For the students, the tricky thing about pronunciation is that it not just a question of acquiring knowledge, it's a physical skill that they need to practise regularly by listening to examples of authentic speech, recording that they have practiced, learning through phonemic chart, mastering minimal pairs on www.blairenglish.com, www.soundsofenglish.com, www.shiporsheep.com, www.testyourenglispronunciation.com Then check on www.translate.google.com

A collection of strategies and exercises for helping the students can be given by the EFL teachers, particularly in relation to remedial work. These can be simple things, such as: Modelling and Drilling; Exaggeration of features and over-articulation; Using minimal pairs to differentiate between sounds; Physical techniques. For example, work on tongue placement for /ð/ and /θ/ by having students place their fingers to their lips and asking them to touch their fingers with the tips of their tongues when they form the sound; Simple bio-feedback techniques, such as having students place their fingers on the larynx to feel the difference between voiced and voiceless sounds; Using props. Apart from the work on individual sounds, the work on words or sentence, including word stress, consonant clusters and intonation should be focused on.

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