

AMINU BALA DANYARO

AND

FAROUK ABDULLAHI

SPOKEN ENGLISH

Introduction

The significance of spoken English within and outside the university community is quite obvious, because the quality of one's spoken English is an eloquent testimony of one's level of education and literacy. In other words, the possibility of having your message understood, or otherwise, depends, largely on the effectiveness of one's speaking skills. Some people, although knowledgeable in their discipline, are often highly limited in spoken English; hence, find themselves in a very embarrassing position, when called upon to make a public address, participate in a television/radio panel or make a conversation.

As a student in the university, you may be required to address your class, answer questions in the class, make a representation to a lecturer or deliver an address of welcome to a visiting dignitary, etc. This, obviously, demands that you need to possess a good mastery of speaking skills, regardless of your discipline or background. Indeed, your future career or success may depend on how well you can express yourself or defend your decisions.

Essentially, this module focuses on providing practical explanation and drills that may enhance the students' ability to acquire and develop effective speaking skills in the English language. Issues related to the English sounds, syllable structures, stress and intonation are, therefore, among what the module intends to discuss. In addition, the differences between British and American English, in terms of spelling, vocabulary and pronunciation, will be given special attention.

THE ENGLISH SOUNDS

The English speech sounds are going to be discussed according to two major categories:

Consonants	Vowels
Monophthongs	▼ Diphthongs

CONSONANT SOUNDS

consonants are mostly articulated via closure or obstruction in the vocal tract. Hence, there are 24 consonant sounds in English that represent the 21 consonant letters. The sounds are:

1. /p/ as in popular, tap
2. /b/ as in burst, blurb
3. /t/ as in tank, part
4. /d/ as in dull, good
5. /k/ as in kettle, cake
6. /g/ as in gold, jug
7. /tʃ/ as in check, search
8. /dʒ/ as in job, age
9. /f/ as in fan, laugh
10. /v/ as in van, save
11. /θ/ as in thick, month
12. / / as in there, father
13. /s/ as in sin, loose
14. /z/ as in zip, lose
15. /ʃ/ as in ship, pressure

16. /ʒ/ as in vision, revision
17. /h/ as in hope, perhaps
18. /m/ as in mug, farm
19. /n/ as in now, loan
20. /ŋ/ as in sing, bank
21. /l/ as in load, tall
22. /r/ as in ring, supra
23. /j/ as in you, stew
24. /w/ as in was, prowess

VOWEL SOUNDS

Unlike consonant sounds, vowel sounds are produced with a relatively free flow of air there are 20 vowel sounds in English that represent the 5 vowel letters. The vowel sounds are of two types: monophthongs:

MONOPHTHONGS

Monophthongs, which are also called pure vowels, consist of single vowel sound either short or long. The long ones are identified by a colon placed in front of them. Listen to your lecturer while reading the sounds below and repeat after him/her:

1. /ɪ/ as in hit, live
2. /i:/ as in free, key
3. /e/ as in men, weapon
4. /æ/ as in cap, ash
5. /a:/ as in harm, bark
6. /ɔ/ as in office, hot
7. /ɔ:/ as in saw, walk

8. /ʊ/ as in book, put
9. /U:/ as in do, food
10. /ʌ/ as in son/sun, money
11. /ɜ:/ as in sir, firm
12. /ə/ as in away, colour

DIPHTHONGS

Diphthongs are vowels which consist of two distinct vowels, but which together produce a single sound .

1. /eɪ/ as in pay, make
2. /ɔɪ/ as in boy, soil
3. /əɪ/ as in mine, lie
4. /əʊ/ as in out, down
5. /aʊ/ as in home, so
6. /ɪə/ as in near, tear
7. /eə/ as in hair, care
8. /ʊə/ as in cure, poor

MINIMAL PAIRS

Minimal pairs refer to a situation when two words one are identical in form except for a contrast in one phoneme (sound) occurring in the same position examples:

- | | |
|---------|------|
| 1. Pat | bat |
| 2. Fan | van |
| 3. Bet | bat |
| 4. Site | side |
| 5. Pig | big |

- | | |
|---------|------|
| 6. Dig | wig |
| 7. Law | raw |
| 8. Fall | hall |
| 9. Tax | dry |
| 10. Try | dry |

You may have noticed that the pairs given above are based on consonants. We can also have other pairs using vowels contrast:

- | | |
|-----------|-------|
| 1. Feat | fit |
| 2. Fat | fate |
| 3. Hall | hole |
| 4. Cat | cut |
| 5. Pool | full |
| 6. See | saw |
| 7. Come | came |
| 8. Man | men |
| 9. Caught | cot |
| 10. Pass | purse |

VOWEL MUTATION

This refers to a situation whereby a vowel sound is realised in one form of an English word but different in another form of word. For example, the /ðɪ/ sound in “derive” changes to another vowel sound when the form of the word reads “derivation”, which requires the /ɪ/ sound. Here are more examples of such words:

Devide	division
--------	----------

Decide	decision
--------	----------

Criticise	criticism
Multiply	multiplication
Identify	identification etc.

SYLLABLE STRUCTURES AND CONSONANT CLUSTERS

SYLLABLE STRUCTURE

A syllable is a word or part of a word, which contains a consonant and a vowel, often represented as CV. For instance, in the word ‘go’, we have a consonant and a vowel; liver consists of two syllable ‘li’ (CV) and ‘ver’ (CV). On a general note, a syllable must contain a vowel sound. This means that a vowel sound can constitute a syllable in a word. Below are examples of words in different syllable structures.

One syllable words (monosyllable): come, go, no, home, south, east, broom, blue, hand, set, free, etc.

Two syllable words: teacher, marker, curfew, madam, purchase, perfume, motion, river, estate, consume, in few, etc.

Three syllable words: photograph, autograph, chancellor, elevate, constant, gregarious, insistence, exactly, contemptuous, guarantee, decorous, informal, etc.

Four syllable words: development, comparable, welfarism, intelligence, agriculture, controversy, developing, etc.

Five syllable words: capitalism, colonialism, selectivity, extravagancy, cooperation, consideration, etc.

Six syllable words: extraordinary, superiority, constitutionalise, vulnerability, internationalise, experimentation etc.

Seven syllable words: constitutionalism, intelligibility, irresponsibility, industrialization, egalitarianism etc.

Eight syllable words: irreconcilability, internationalisation, etc.

CONSONANT CLUSTER

A consonant cluster refers to a situation whereby a word or a syllable in a word contains two or more consonants, without an intervening vowel. For example, in the word 'free', 'f' and 'v' form a cluster, because we have to pronounce them without a vowel in between; /fr/ rather than /fir/, for instance. Now, let us study examples of different cluster in different words:

Two consonant cluster: travel, dress, pleasure, bride, prince, three, style, school, frank, fleet, glass, grand, help, hopes, host, ask, health, mopped, walks, talked, armed, etc.

Three consonant clusters: strike, spring, splash, scribe, helps, wasps, corrupts, dumped, selves, salts, expects, next, experience, conclud, describe, distress, disclose, transpire etc.

Four consonant clusters: exclaim, explain, extract, texts, exempts, sixths, twelfths etc.

STRESS AND INTONATION

Stress refers to the prominence given to a syllable. In many languages, like English, certain syllables in a word are louder, slightly higher in pitch and somewhat longer in duration than others in the word. These types of syllables are referred to as stressed syllable.

In words of one syllable, the stress falls on the one syllable, for example, in words like short, tall, broom, skin, space, men, here, or hair.

In words of two syllables, there are two ways. Some of these words take the stress on the first syllable, whereas others on the second. For example:

S/N	Stress first syllable	Stress second syllable
-----	-----------------------	------------------------

1.	Farmer	Inform
2.	Teacher	Concern
3.	Madam	Consume
4.	Curfew	Record
5.	Market	Infer
6.	Motion	Esteem
7.	River	Conceive

Moreover, there are some English words that are stressed on the first syllable when used as nouns and on the second when used as verbs. For example:

S/N	Noun	Verb
1.	Contract	Contract
2.	Insult	Insult
3.	Contrast	Contrast
4.	Produce	Produce
5.	Convict	Convict
6.	Contact	Contact
7.	Subject	Subject

Words of three syllables may be stressed on the first, second or third, depending on the particular word. For example:

First

Second

Third

Telephone

imperial

guarantee

Bachelor	enjoyment	addressee
Barrister	superior	refugee
President	important	understand

Words of four syllables also fall into four categories. There are some words that attract stress on the first syllable, while others on the second, third or fourth, as the case may be. For example:

First	second	third	fourth
Comparable	experience	compensation	Vietnamese
Humanism	intelligence	agriculture	officialise
Socialism	conservator	controversy	

Words consisting of five syllables may have any one of them stressed, whether the first, second, third, or fourth syllable; depending on the word. For example:

First	second	third	fourth
Capitalism	exploratory	selectivity	cooperation
Regionalism	irreparable	meritocracy	consideration
Nationalism	comparatively	collectivity	reintegration

A word of six syllables may have the stress on the third, fourth or fifth syllable, depending on the word. For example:

Third	fourth	fifth
Constitutionalise	inferiority	experimentation

Internationalise vulnerability decolonisation

Indistinguishable superiority

COMPOUND WORDS

When words are in isolation, they have their normal stress patterns, but when they occur in combination with other words as compounds, their individual stress patterns may change.

Thus, the stress in compound words may be on the first or second word. For example:

First word	Second word
Diving-hall, frying-pan, baking-pawder, feeding-bottle, saving-account, pass-book, guard-room, high-life, light-show, boarding- school, set-back, morning-dress, marriage certificate, sewing-machine, short-hand, set- aside, light-pen	High-grade, short-term, high-living, short- staffed, morning-star, set-book, surgical- spirit, marriage-guidance, minister-of-state, short-lived etc.

INTONATION PATTERN

Unlike stress, which most of the time operates at word level, intonation operates at sentence level. Every kind of sentence has its own intonation pattern. Intonation refers to the general direction of your voice when you utter a sentence or a phrase. You can usually tell, even if you do not speak a language, when someone is asking a question or making a statement. Intonation is determined via falling or rising tune or both. In general, falling tune is revealed in simple declarative sentences, commands and wh-question, whereas the rising tune is used in polite is used in long question and listing of items. The fall-rise is used in long questions and long sentences, while exclamatory sentences require that the whole sentence remains high. Eg

FALLING TUNE

Simple declaration sentence:

- a. Rahma is a good girl
- b. I am going to school
- c. He wants to join the committee

COMMAND

- a. Come here!
- b. Wait a minute!
- c. Drive carefully

Wh-questions:

- a. When do you pray?
- b. Where in your friend?
- c. Who instructed you?

RISING TUNE

Polite request:

- a. Bring the bag her please
- b. Can you type a little faster please?
- c. Can I come with you?

Yes/No question

- a. Did you tell him?
- b. Is it important?
- c. Are you a student?

Listing of Items:

- a. She bought a pair of shoes, a bag and a veil.
- b. There are many things in the room, such as bed, chair, table, fan and word robe
- a. the course, haven't you?

ALL HIGH**EXCLAMATORY**

- a. He is the new VC!
- b. They are withdrawn!
- c. You have succeeded!

SOME TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ORAL SKILLS

1. Try to establish the connection between the symbols and the sounds they represent in your mind, so as to (continue to) use them appropriately.
2. While using words with consonant clusters, try not to introduce any vowel in between the clusters. This is because in most Nigeria languages, every consonant is followed by a vowel. In essence, avoid intrusion.
3. If you have any doubt on the meaning of a word or its correct pronunciation, consult your dictionary for further guide.
4. Note the differences between British and American English, in terms of spelling, vocabulary and pronunciation, in order to remain consistent with any of the two you choose to use at a particular instance. For example:

Spelling	Vocabulary
----------	------------

Pronunciation

5. Try to identify silent letters in some English words, so that you do not produce them while using such words in your spoken English. For instance, the bold letters in the following words are not pronounced, i.e. they are silent:

Honour, **h**eir, **h**eiress, castle, receipt, plumber, ex**h**ibit, veh**h**icle, deb**t**, sub**t**le, apostle, ad**j**ective, listen, ad**j**acent, Birmingham, ad**j**unct, muscle, isle, bomb**b**, comb**b**, indict, (ment) etc.

6. Avoid mother tongue interference (in pronunciation). It is obvious, according to Isa (? :124) that virtually all Nigerians learn English as a second language. In this kind of situation, experts on language learning argue that features of the first language inevitably get transferred into the second language, in this case English. For example, Yoruba speakers have a problem with sh and ch, v and f, th and t and, h and e etc, as in chart and short, chop and shop, wash and watch, very and ferry, house and ouse, van and fan, that and dat, them and dem, thin and tin, thick and tick, three and tree, egg and hegg etc.

Igbo speakers also have problems with th, r, y, and l as in thirty and titi, that and dat, prayer and player, viver and liver, lice and rice, lie and rye, ruck and luck, yam and nyam etc. empirical evidences also prove that Tiv speakers of English also have some common problems with Igbos.

Hausa speakers have problems with v and b, f and p, th and s or z as in very and berry, vest and best, fan and pan, fall and push, think and sink, thank and sank, them and zem, this and zis etc.

7. Beware of Homographs and Homophones: homographs on the one hand are words of the same spelling, but have different pronunciation. For example, minute (i) and minute (ôl), read (infinitive) and read (past), refuse (noun) and refuse (verb), bear (animal) and bear (to carry), live (verb) and live (adjective) etc.

Homophones, on the other hand, are words of the same pronunciation, but different spelling. For example, read and red, grey and gray, wright and write or right, meat and meet, check and cheque, son and sun, know and no, hail and hale, pidgin and pigeon etc.

8. Learn to listen to good speakers of English via different means, and then practice, in order to overcome a number of your speech inhibitions.

THE ETIQUETTES OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

According to Isa (? :128-130), When someone is asked to present a problem speech or addresses an audience, certain etiquettes often prove very effective in realising the desirable outcome (Isa, ? :128-130). The outcome could be positive response from the audience, complete comprehension of what is being discussed, or having the audience convinced about a certain submission. In order for you to achieve all these, you must, among others, take the following tips into consideration:

- a. The speaker should try to find out the age, gender, status, physical condition, mood and demands of his/her audience, in order to adopt the appropriate attitude while addressing them.
- b. The speaker should read the facial expressions of his/her audience, in reaction to what he/she says, and respond to such reactions accordingly.
- c. The speaker should try to control his/her voice so as to avoid being inaudible.
- d. Although English is a non-African language, cultural etiquettes should be observed in addressing people.
- e. Try to be a good speaker by being logical, meaningful, comprehensive and straight forward.
- f. Do not use local vernacular, slang or some closed code to exclude any part of your audience from a discussion.

- g. Try to observe decorum by being objective, factual, open and responsible in your presentation. Moreover, avoid accusation and vulgar language.
- h. Always listen to understand what another speaker says and never interrupt him/her. Thus, learn to properly use “turn-taking” theory.
- i. Try to avoid any bad speaking habit that will hinder, inhibit or make your presentation uninteresting and ineffective.

GENERAL ACTIVITIES

1. Briefly explain the difference between consonant and vowel sound.
2. For each of the consonant sounds discussed, list 10 words to show how the sound could be realised in English language. The word should manifest the consonant in various positions, not just at the beginning of the word.
3. What are the main differences between short and long vowels?
4. Identify all the short vowel sounds
5. Read the following sentences, paying attention to the consonant and vowel sounds that feature:
 - a. The man has been promoted.
 - b. He has a cap on his head.
 - c. She spent the day in the park.
 - e. The suspects reject the allegation charged upon them.
 - f. Don't sit on that seat please!
 - g. The dog started to bark from the back of the car.
 - h. Although the man lacks many things, he is happy as a lark.
 - i. He will do it.
 - j. Give it to the girl.
 - k. They got the contract.

6. Give an example of:

- a. Words with different consonant clusters.
- b. Word with contrast based on consonant and vowel sounds.

7. Read the following sentences and identify the information patterns they attract:

- a. Rabi'ah is a good girl.
- b. Rabi'ah is a good girl?
- c. Rabi'ah is a good girl!
- d. The lecturer comes regularly, doesn't he/she?
- e. When we meet there, I will show you something.

8. Come up with more examples to show the difference between British and America English in term of spelling, vocabulary and pronunciation.

9. Share your experiences on how your mother tongue influences your spoken English.