

Part 1:

Accent and Communication

What is Accent?

Differences in how people pronounce sounds of language



Social



Geographical



Whose English is It, Anyway?

"Native" accent?



Differences or Errors?

Accent bias

- Equate accent with rudeness, low intelligence
- More critical of grammar or vocabulary errors
- Predisposed to hear errors that aren't there

Rubin 1992 Study: Students heard tape of native speaker of American English reading a lecture.

Group 1 saw this: Group 2 saw this:



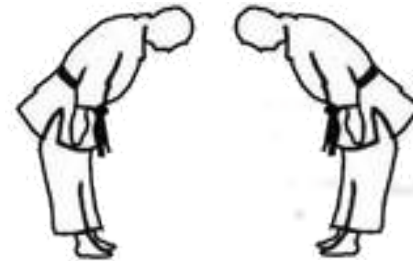
Guess who was
rated harder to
understand?

Accent "Reduction" Model:

- Accent as pathology - accented English is "broken," accent should be "erased."
- Accent as exclusion - "how the other speaks"

How about a little respect?

- Accent as personal/cultural identity
- Accent *addition*: 2nd language accent as new skill
- Cook (1999): Multi-competent language user





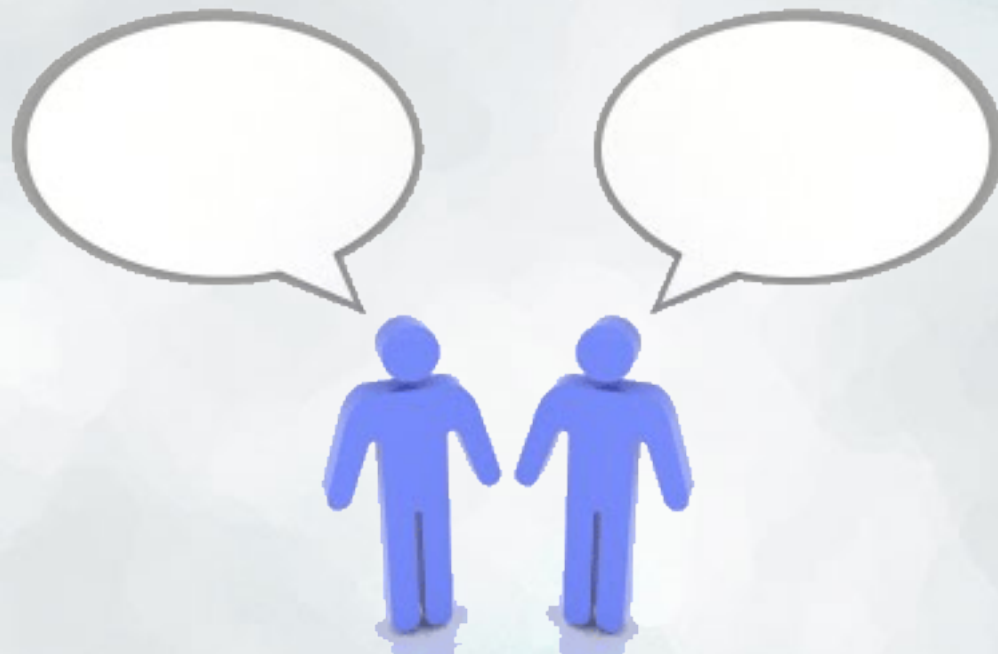
- Does Arnold need accent reduction?
- Can you understand what he's saying?
- Do you have to work a lot to do so?
- Would he be Arnold Schwarzenegger *without* his accent?

A Different Focus: Communication

Learners need to communicate in their new language.

Tracey Derwing: "Comfortably understandable"

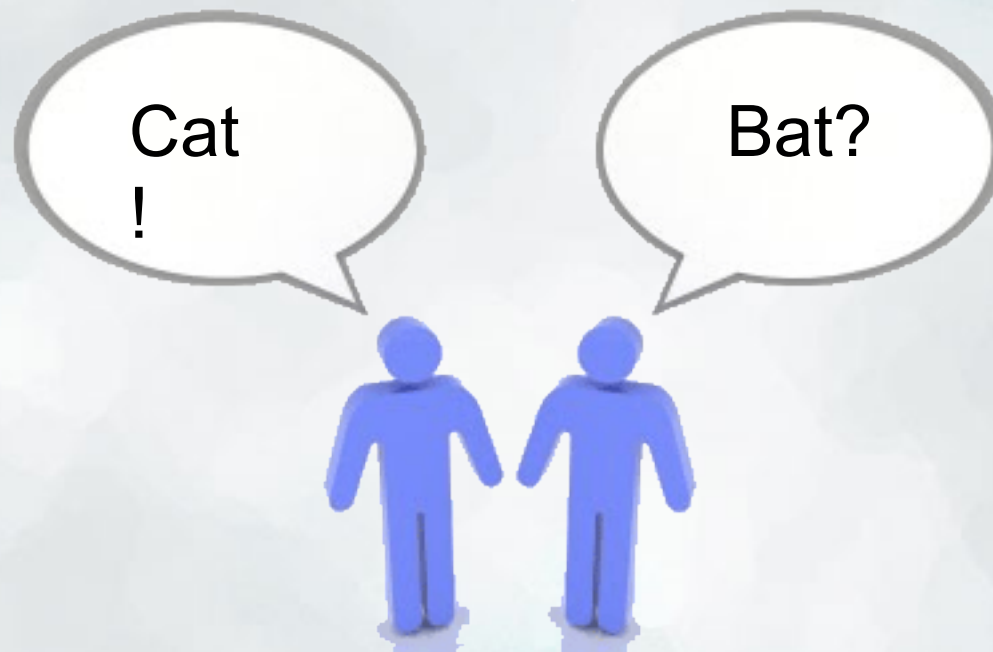
What does that mean?



A Different Focus: Communication

Intelligibility

- Words and phrases should be easily recognizable
- Accent should not distract from meaning
- Listeners should not have to work too hard to understand



A Different Focus: Communication

Comprehensibility

Accent does not increase listener's "communicative burden" - amount of effort necessary to understand



A Different Focus: Communication

Communicability

Learners can use language for what they need to *do*

- Rent an apartment
- Talk to a doctor
- Get a job
- Give a lecture
- Pass a test
- Go shopping
- Etc.



Part 2: The Building Blocks of Speech



Phonemes

Smallest meaningful sound units of speech

Consonants



Vowels



Note : not all sounds are phonemes in all contexts!

You say  , I say 

Not All Phonemes are Created Equal

Focus on phonemes with:

- High "functional load"- occur in many common words
/l, r/: load/road; light/right
/p, b/: pack/back; pit/bit

- Grammatical functions:
/s, z/ for plurals: books/cans
/t, d/ for past tense: jumped/dreamed

- Differences between spelling and pronunciation:
light, cough, shoe, vision, etc.



Aspects of Prosody

Sound patterns of speech in context

Stress:

Differences in length, volume, pitch of key syllables



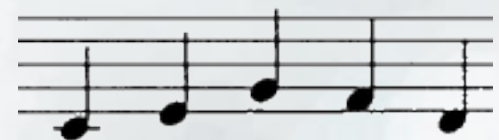
Rhythm:

Alternation of stressed and unstressed sounds



Intonation:

Fluctuations in pitch, "melody" of speech



Connected Speech:

Pronunciation differences created by continuous stream of speech



Prosody? Isn't That Kind of Advanced?

- Road signs for conversation; keeps listeners from getting lost
- Reduces listener's communicative burden
 - Prosody can make words become unrecognizable in context
 - Understanding prosody can help repair communication breakdowns
 - Even if learners mispronounce phonemes, they can often still be understood if prosody is in place



How Do We Do It?

Challenge: teach prosody and high functional load/
grammatical phonemes to maximize intelligibility,
comprehensibility, and communicability



General Guidelines: Presentation

- Description and Analysis - focus students' attention on how sounds are made
- Listening Activities - let students work on sound identification only; no pronunciation required yet



General Guidelines : Practice

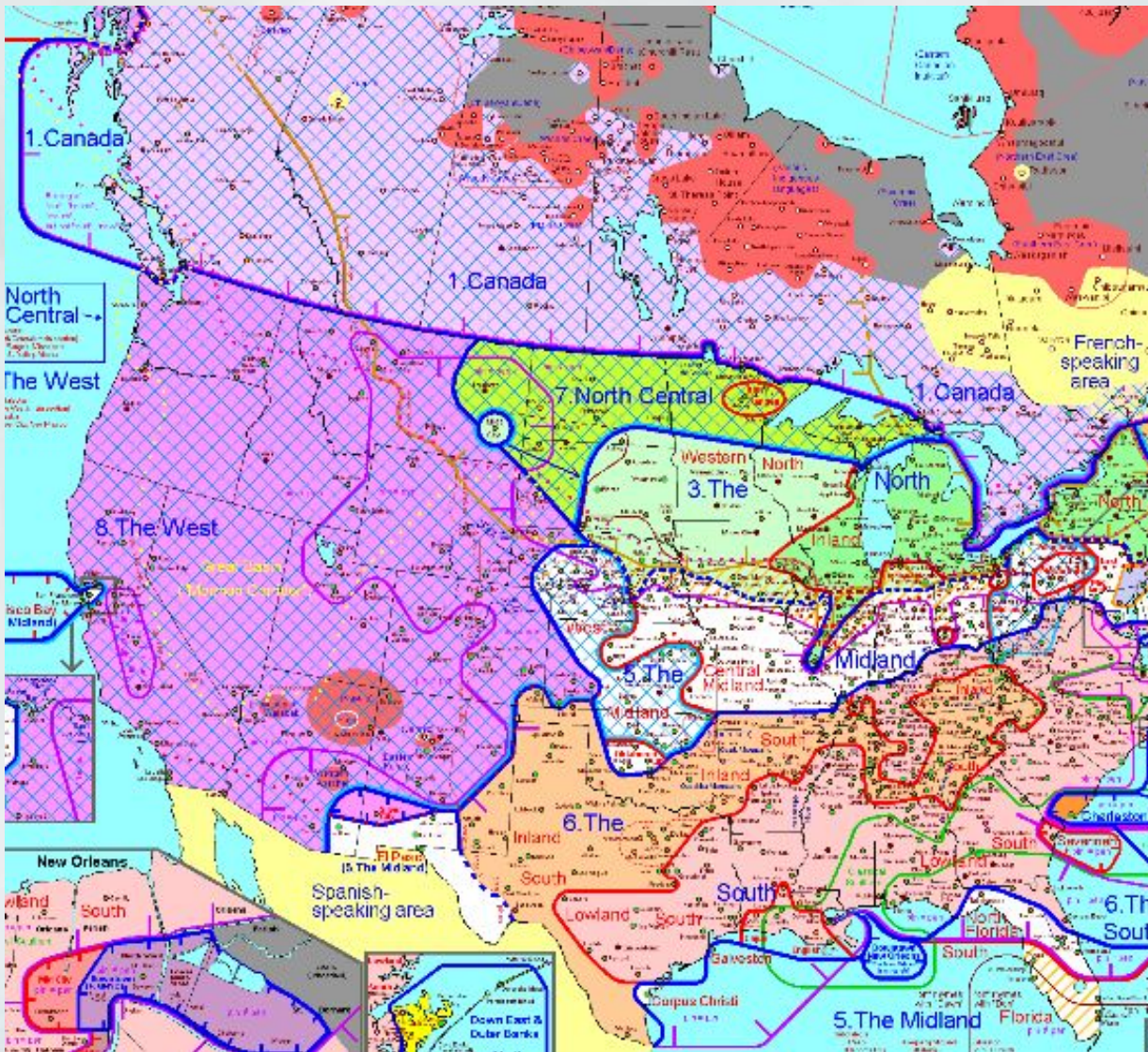
Gradually Remove the Training Wheels

- Controlled - scripted activities; students learn to monitor their own speech
- Guided - activities only partially scripted; students must focus more on meaning
- Communicative - less structured activities, dependent on exchange of information



General Guidelines: Variation

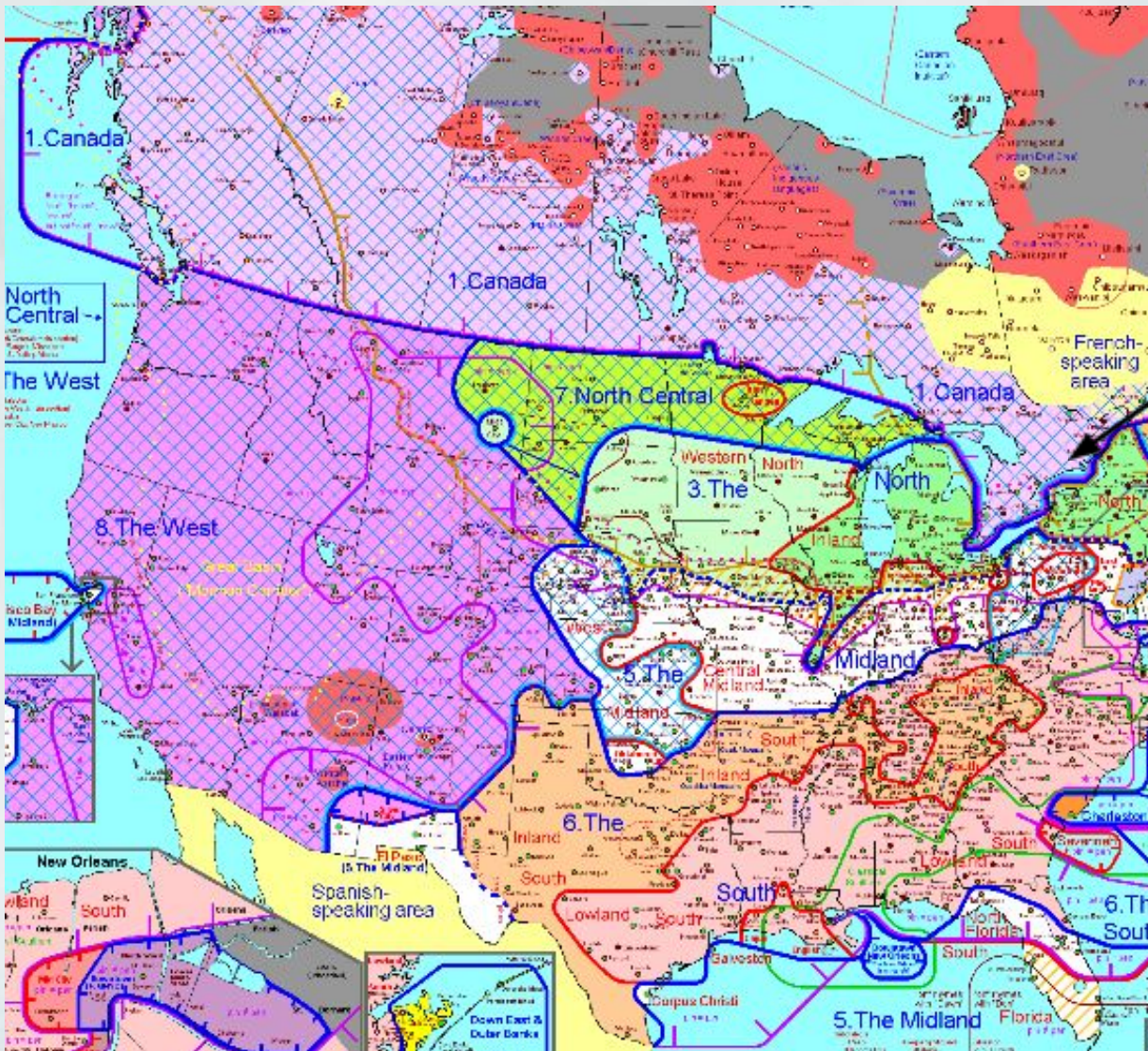
Expose students to different native speaker accents



[Rick Aschman's Interactive Map of North American English Dialects](#)

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Expose students to different native speaker accents



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Part 3: Sample Lessons

Sample Lessons: Vowel Phonemes

- All vowels have a high functional load
- They can indicate grammatical functions
- Pronunciation and spelling are often different



woman /wʊmən/



women /wɪmən/

Vowel Phonemes: Description and Analysis

Consider teaching phonetic symbols to mitigate differences between spelling and pronunciation

one-sound vowels (monophthongs)

[i]	feet	[fi:t]
[ɪ]	sit	[sɪt]
[e]	made	[meɪd]
[ɛ]	bed	[bed]
[æ]	have	[hæv]

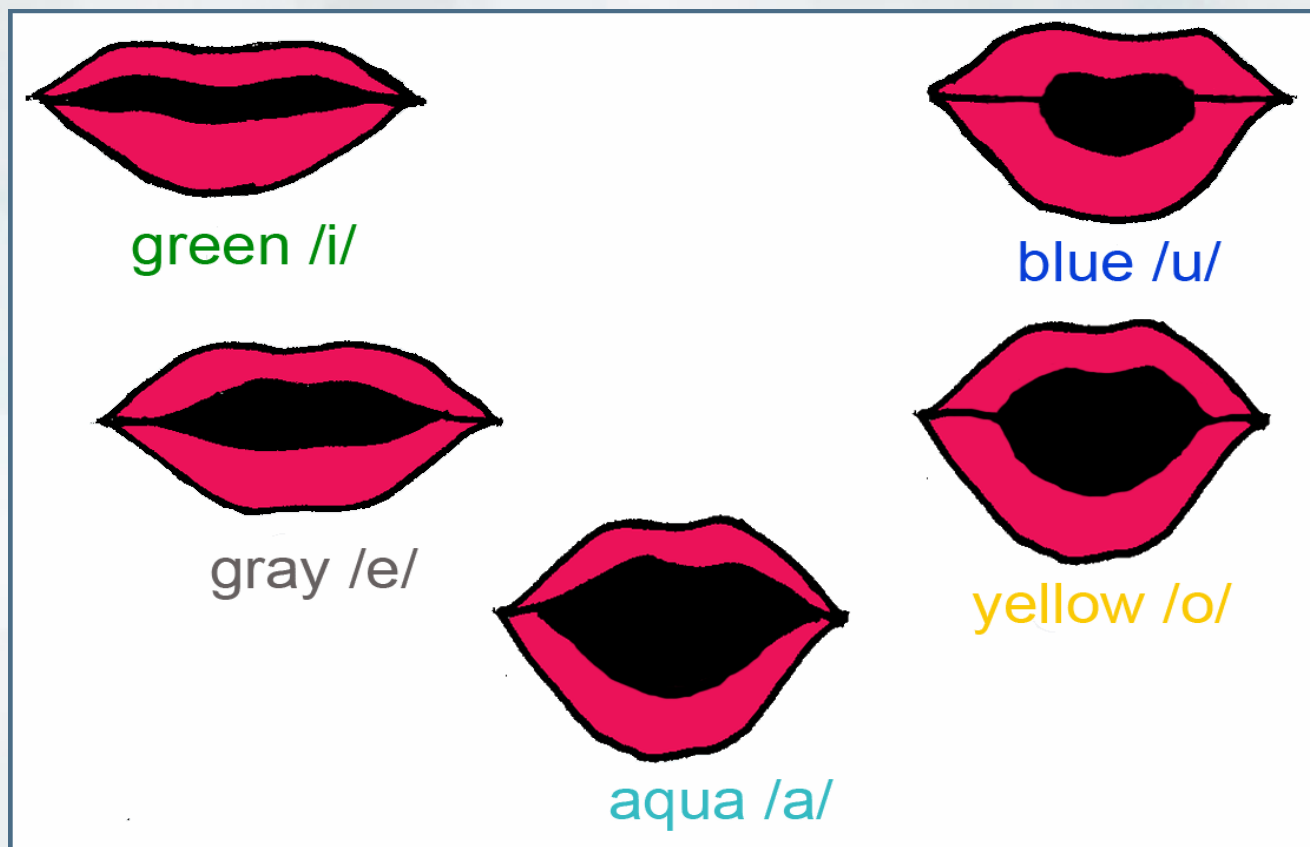
[u]	blue	[blu]
[o]	boat	[bɒt]
[ʊ]	book	[bʊk]
[ə]	banana	[bəˈnænə]
[ʌ]	but	[bʌt]
[ɔ]	call	[kɔl]
[ɑ]	not	[nɒt]

two-sound vowels (diphthongs)

[ɔɪ]	boy	[bɔɪ]
[aɪ]	sky	[skaɪ]
[aʊ]	now	[naʊ]

Vowel Phonemes: Description and Analysis

- Show students how vowels depend on shape of lips and "openness" of mouth.
- Give a set of sample words for each vowel, e.g. animals or colors, as a mnemonic



Vowel Phonemes: Focused Listening

- Minimal pairs - Pairs of words/phrases where only one sound differs, changing the meaning
 - Words: bit / bat
 - Phrases: I'm not going today / to die.
- Pictorial worksheet - teacher repeats a minimal pair; students circle the word they hear



/ɛ/



/æ/

In Defense of Choral Repetition

Practice Makes Perfect - Automaticity Requires:

1. Noticing differences
2. Consciously using new knowledge
3. Unconsciously using new knowledge

Safety in Numbers - easier to practice new, hard sounds if you're lost in a crowd of voices



Vowel Phonemes: Controlled Practice

Ask for words with target vowel sound in a specific category, eg, animals, foods, etc.



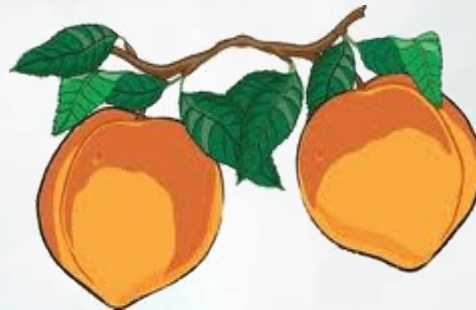
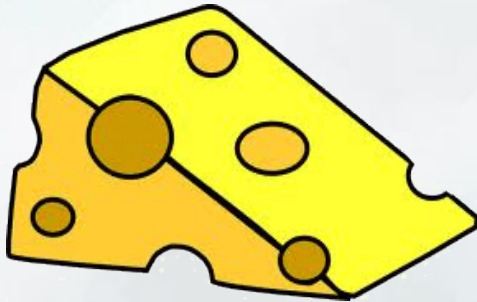
/I/

Vowel Phonemes: Controlled Practice

Make it harder by asking for words with contrasting vowels in each category



/ɪ/

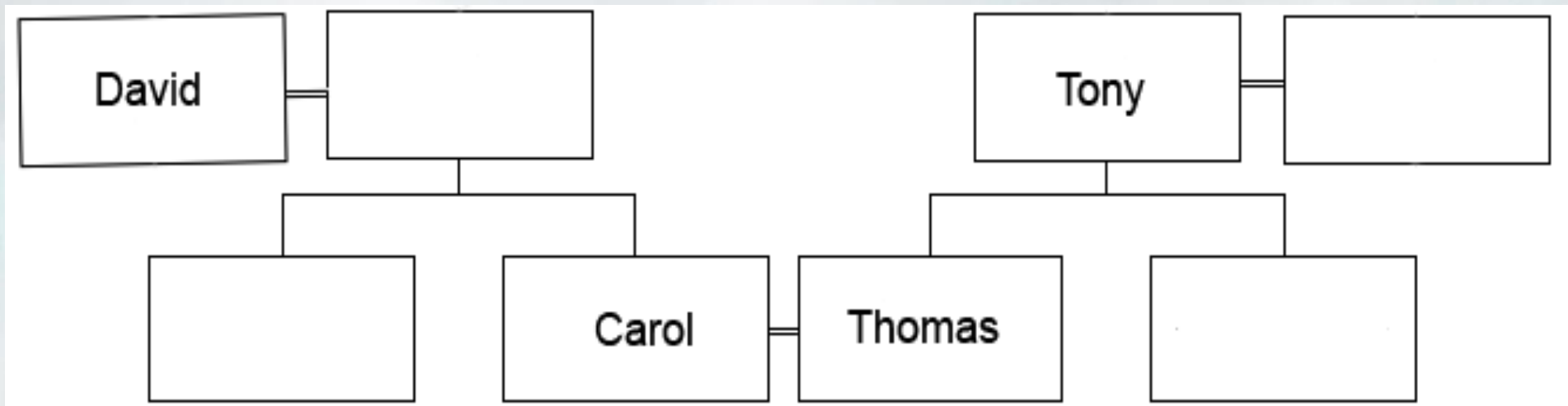


/i:/

Vowel Phonemes: Guided Practice

Family Tree - Integrate pronunciation into vocabulary lesson

Siblings and married couples have same first vowel in their names:



Discussion Script:

- David is married to _____.
- Carol's sister is _____.
- Etc...

Amy
Karen
Joan
Donald

Vowel Phonemes:

Guided Practice

Limericks

There was an old fellow from Dover,
Who ran through a field of blue clover.
But some very large bees
Stung his nose and his knees,
So his fun times in Dover were over.



Read aloud and point out rhyme scheme: A-A-B-B-A

- Which words rhyme?
- What vowel do they contain? /i/ /o/
- Are there any other words with the same vowel?

Vowel Phonemes:

Communicative Practice

Limericks

Provide a template for students to write their own limericks.

There once was a student named _____,
Who wanted to dance with a/an _____.
S/he tried not to _____ it,
But s/he happened to _____ it,
So the _____ ended up on his/her _____.

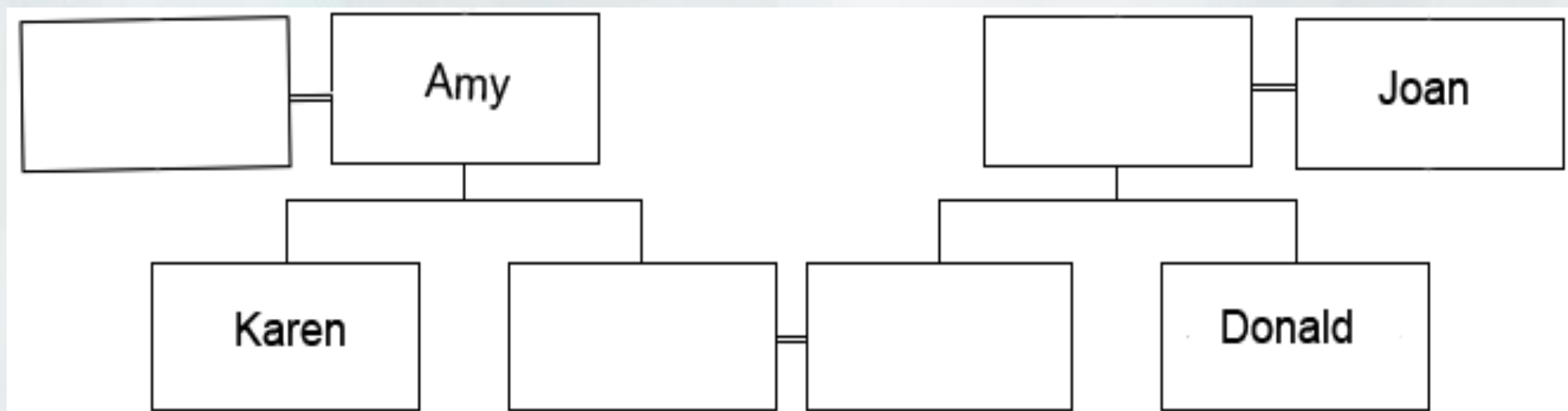
Have students read their limericks to a partner; partner should identify rhyming vowels.

Vowel Phonemes: Communicative Practice Family Tree as Jigsaw Activity



Give partners family trees with *different* names filled in.

Partners work with script to help each other fill in names *without looking at their partner's tree*.



Vowel Phonemes: Communicative Practice

Minimal Pair Improv Game

1. Partner A starts a conversation with a sentence containing target vowel sound.
2. Partner B replies using contrasting vowel sound, and conversation continues.

Example: contrasting sounds /e/ and /æ/:

A: Do you have a hat?

B: Yes, see, I'm wearing one!

A: Oh, and it matches your pants.



Sample Lessons: Sentence Stress

- Content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives) usually carry the stress of a sentence
- Function words (articles, prepositions, etc.) are usually unstressed, and often reduced.
- MOST important word in a phrase gets extra stress: focus word, nuclear stress

ai du nat **LAIK** grin ɛgz n hæm



Sentence Stress:

Description and Analysis

Use visual cues and gestures to show how stressed syllables are highlighted in speech--stressed sounds are:

L - O - N - G - E - R: N - O - O - O - dle

LOUDER!: um - **BRELL!** - a

More **intense**: **POP** - corn

Sentence Stress:

Description and Analysis

Use a marking system to show stress patterns in words and phrases:

a-pos'tro-phes

● ●
bubb-les

/ □ □ /
sla-shes and u's

ác-cent marks

CAP-it-al LETT-ers

un-der-lin-ing

Sentence Stress:

Description and Analysis

- Compare stress patterns of longer words with phrases containing the same amount of syllables:
 - OV-er-LOOK --> TELL the COOK
 - e-LEC-tri-fi-CA-tion --> we TOOK a va-CA-tion
- Stretch a rubber band to illustrate lengthened stressed syllables



Sentence Stress: Focused Listening

Kinesthetic Reinforcement: Poetry in Motion

Move part of body to imitate stress patterns

- Walking/stepping/marching
- Wave hand or pencil
- Nod head
- Bob entire body
- High five
- Flick fingers



Sentence Stress: Focused Listening

1. Read a short poem or nursery rhyme aloud.
2. Ask students to clap or tap desks for each stressed syllable.
3. Provide a transcript and ask students to mark the stressed syllables.

**PAT a cake, PAT a cake,
BA-ker's MAN
BAKE me a CAKE
As FAST as you CAN;
ROLL it and PAT it
And MARK it with a 'B',
And PUT it in the OV-en
For BA-by and ME.**



Sentence Stress: Controlled Practice

Reduced (Unstressed) Words:

Make a set of "Memory" cards:

- Phrase cards with an unstressed function word left out, eg What's _____ name?
- Word cards containing the missing unstressed function words, eg: your, in, is of, etc.

Shuffle cards, put them out face down, and ask students to match pairs.

When students find a pair, they should read the phrase aloud, making sure to use the reduced pronunciation of the unstressed function word.

Sentence Stress: Guided Practice

Talking About Jobs

Have students practice a model dialogue:

A: WHAT do you DO?

B: I'M a DOCTor, and I WORK in a HOSpital. WHAT do **YOU** DO?*

A: I'M a TEACHer, and I WORK at the HIGH SCHOOL.

Hand out cards with other profession/location pairs. Have students circulate and interview each other.

Ask students to provide examples of the information they found: "SHE's a SCientist, and she WORKS in a LAB."

*Note contrastive stress. New information is most important.

Sentence Stress: Communicative Practice

Improv Game: Freeze!

1. Create a set of cards (get students to help!) with types of characters, eg, a plumber, a teacher, Yoda, etc.
2. Shuffle each group of cards, and ask two students to choose cards.
3. Allow a few minutes of planning time, then have students improvise a conversation between their characters.
4. At any time, a classmate may shout "freeze!" and choose another card to replace one of the actors.

A Final Thought: What About Us?

What responsibility do native speakers have when it comes to understanding accented speech?

Intelligibility -

"Listeners should not have to work too hard to understand."

How hard is too hard?



Derwing, et al, 2002: Teaching Native Speakers to Listen to Foreign Accented Speech

- Group 1 got training in understanding Vietnamese accented English + cultural sensitivity training
- Group 2 got cultural sensitivity training
- Group 3 got no training - control group

Results:

- NO improvement in actual listening comprehension
- ALL groups reported PERCEIVED improvement, and increase in empathy for accented speakers
- Largest gain in group 1 (accent + cultural training)

Combined with Rubin 1992 Study (students who saw Asian speaker rated lecture harder to understand)...



What does that say about accent and communicative burden?

Combined with Rubin 1992 Study (students who saw Asian speaker rated lecture harder to understand)...



What does that say about accent and communicative burden?

“To listen is an effort, and just to hear is no merit. A duck hears also.” -- Igor Stravinsky



Listening to Accented English



the speech *accent* archive

<http://accent.gmu.edu/>

- Same paragraph read by native and non-native speakers
- Designed to elicit all English phonemes
- Search by region or native language
- Phonetically transcribed
- Accent differences noted
- Native phonetic inventory - chart of sounds found in each language

