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Oral Communication for Non-Native Speakers of English

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CHAPTER I

VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

I.

Overview

Undoubtedly, **vowels** and **consonants** (collectively known as **segmentals**) are at the heart of pronunciation teaching – they are the unavoidable building blocks of oral communication. In an intelligibility-based approach to pronunciation, this truth does not change. Being able to accurately pronounce the sounds of a language largely determines the degree of clarity a person will be able to communicate. However, this does not entail 100% accuracy. In fact, native listeners are quite adept at being able to piece together the meaning of words, phrases, and even sentences which contain a mispronunciation. In other words, the more a speaker's pronunciation parallels that of the listener's, the more the listener's mind is able to process these features automatically, instead of consciously. As a listener devotes more effort towards deciphering the form (in this case, the individual sounds), the less brainpower they have to invest in understanding the speaker's content, which is what we want to avoid!

The most important thing to remember when teaching or learning segmental features – in fact, with all pronunciation features – is that a great deal of it has to do with habit-building. It is quite easy to produce a segmental sound in isolation when it's the primary focus; it's another story to produce it consistently while devoting mental power towards developing content.

Thankfully, problems in mispronunciations are not random or chaotic. In fact, they can be highly predicted depending on the learner's L1. There are three common, over-arching problems that language learners can run into when learning the sounds (or **phones**) of a second language:

1. Learners frequently hear L2 phonemes as allophonic
 - Japanese speakers can have difficulties hearing the difference between /ɪ/ and /I/ and Korean speakers can have difficulties with /f/ and /p/ because these languages categorize the sounds as allophones
2. L2 learners struggle to identify phonetically different L2 allophones as belonging to the same phoneme
 - Many L2 English learners struggle to identify the General American **flap** [ɾ] found in words like “water” as an allophone of /t/ because its voicing renders it much more like /d/
3. Learners' pronunciation is strongly impact by repeated listening to a word's

phonemic structure

2.

Consonants

When learning the distinct consonant phonemes of North American English (NAE), there are three main dimensions for which they can be distinguished: **Voicing**, **Place of Articulation**, and **Manner of Articulation**.

Places and Manners of Articulation

Place of Articulation refers to *where* the sound is made in the mouth. In NAE, there are seven places of articulation:

- **Bilabial**
- **Labiodental**
- **Dental**
- **Alveolar**
- **Palatal**
- **Velar**
- **Glottal**

Manner of Articulation refers to *how* the sound is made. In NAE, there are six manners of articulation:

- **Stop**, or *plosive*
- **Fricative**
- **Affricate**
- **Nasal**
- **Liquid**
- **Glide**

Table 1. The Classification of Consonant Sounds

Manner of Articulation	Voicing	Place of Articulation						
		Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	Voiceless	/p/			/t/		/k/	
	Voiced	/b/			/d/		/g/	
Fricative	Voiceless		/f/	/θ/	/s/	/ʃ/		/h/
	Voiced		/v/	/ð/	/z/	/ʒ/		
Affricate	Voiceless					/tʃ/		
	Voiced					/dʒ/		
Nasal	Voiced	/m/			/n/		/ŋ/	
Liquid	Voiced				/l/	/r/	/ɹ/	
Glide	Voiced	/w/				/y/		

Activities



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Consonant Clusters

This next group of sounds can be quite challenging for certain L1 backgrounds. The simple explanation is that not every language “allows” consonant clusters like English does. Take, for example, the word *strengths*. The syllable structure for this word looks like CCCVCCCC (/strɛŋkθs/). Now take a Japanese learner of English, who comes from a language that only allows syllables to be either V or CV. You can immediately notice the trouble this learner is going to have. The learner, unaccustomed to producing such syllables, is undoubtedly going to either add or delete certain sounds from the word *strengths* so that it fits with the rules of their L1.

Four Types of Segmental Pronunciation Errors

- **Addition** or Epenthesis
- **Deletion**
- **Distortion**
- **Substitution**

There are some who have tried to pin which of these errors causes the most problems to intelligibility, though it is highly understudied and the results are inconclusive. Preliminary findings suggest that segmental errors in stressed syllables cause more damage to intelligibility than those in unstressed, and that word-initial errors can also cause more damage, as it leads the listener on a wild goose chase for a word that was not intended.

Don't fret! There are plenty of common rules to these consonant clusters.

Rules for Consonant Clusters

Syllable-initial clusters can come in clusters of two or three, and there are certain conditions that must be met for them to occur.

Clusters of Two

One of two conditions must be met:

- Either the first sound is /s/, or,
- The second sound is an **approximant** (/l, r, w, y/)

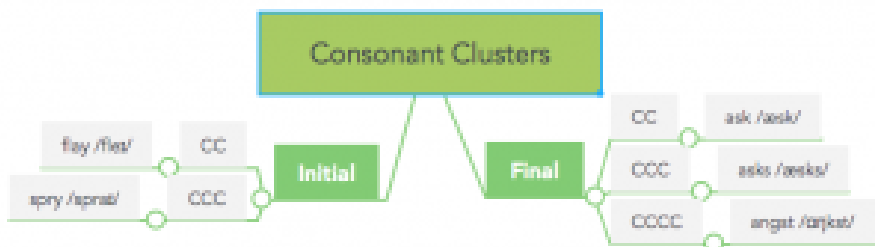
Sometimes, however, both conditions can hold true, like in the word “swift” /swift/.

Clusters of Three

While more challenging than its counterpart, the conditions are much more strict:

- The first sound must be /s/
- The second sound must be a voiceless stop (/p, t, k/)
- The third sound must be an approximant (/l, r, w, y/)

Syllable-final clusters are a bit tougher to categorize. However, many clusters of two or three, and pretty much all clusters of four, are formed by adding a plural (/s, z/) or past tense (/t, d/) inflection to a word.



Activities



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4.

Vowels

It can be argued that, while consonants can provide difficulties, it is the vowels that can be the most damaging to a person's intelligibility. It is important to note, however, that **there are a few English monophthong (single vowel) distinctions which should not be a major concern, namely /ɑ /-/ ɔ /-/ɒ/**. While some North American and British dialects still distinguish the /ɑ/ in “cot” from /ɔ/ in “caught,” other North American and British dialects use only one low-back vowel whose phonetic quality can vary widely, with some regions and individuals pronouncing it more like /ɑ/and some more like /ɔ/.

/ɑ/ - /ɔ/ distinction

- /ɑ/ in “cot”



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- /ɔ/ in “caught”



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Besides monophthongs, all L1 English dialects also include **diphthongs** (two adjacent vowels within a single syllable that are processed by listeners as a single vowel). However, only a few of these diphthongs are present across dialects, namely /aɪ/ in words like “tide,” /aʊ/ in words like “doubt” and /ɔɪ/ in words like “toy.” Therefore **L2 English speakers must acquire only these phonemic diphthongs to avoid compromised intelligibility.**

Major diphthongs

- /aɪ/ in words like “tide”



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- /aʊ/ in words like “doubt”



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- /ɔɪ/ in words like “toy”



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Additional English diphthongs mark regional accent but are not phonemic, that is, reduced intelligibility is not likely to result if speakers use the pure vowel /o/ instead of the diphthong /oʊ/ when pronouncing words such as “toe” or the pure vowel /e/ instead of the diphthong /eɪ/ when pronouncing words like “day” (or vice versa). However, L2 speakers of English, particularly if their L1 includes only monophthongs, a.k.a. **pure vowels** (e.g., Spanish), frequently struggle to glide from the initial to final vowel of even the phonemic diphthongs of English.

IPA symbol	Examples	IPA symbol	Examples
/i/	beat, see	/u/	boot, shoe
/ɪ/	bit, him	/ʊ/	book, pull
/eɪ/	bait, face, they	/oʊ/ or /ow/	home, blow, boat
/ɛ/	bet, leg, head	/ɔ/	caught, naught
/æ/	black, mat, apple	/ɑ/	cot, not
/ʌ/	but, mother	/aɪ/	eye , bite, sight
/ə/	sofa, until, combine	/aʊ/ or /aw/	cloud, shroud, cow
		/ɔɪ/ or /oy/	boy, choice, noise

Activities



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5.

Additional Activities



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Teacher's Corner

A useful website for letting students hear the *glide* required for intelligible diphthong pronunciation is [Eric Armstrong's voice & speech source](#). A useful tool for letting students see the glide required for diphthongs is the [University of Iowa's "Sounds of Speech."](#)

Students may nevertheless get stuck on one or more minimal pairs they cannot seem to make any progress in perceiving. It can be helpful at this point to train them in physically articulating the difference between the two problem sounds – e.g., via [Nilsen & Nilsen's \(2010\) Pronunciation Contrasts](#) for monophthongs and the [University of Iowa's "Sounds of Speech"](#) tool for diphthongs – so they get a sense of what exactly the difference is that they are listening for (e.g., When I pronounce /æ/, does my mouth look more open in a mirror as well as sound more open to my ears than my pronunciation of /ε/?)

Encouraging students to pronounce the problem vowel for as long a time as they need in order to check that they really have produced its distinguishing features can be useful.

It can also be beneficial to encourage students to temporarily exaggerate other articulatory differences between problem phonemes. For example, making tense vowels as tense as physically possible to most clearly distinguish them from lax vowels or opening the mouth as widely as possible for low vowels to most clearly distinguish them from mid vowels, etc., since their necessarily unstable pronunciation of new phonemes will naturally gravitate back toward standard norms over time.

Finally, for long-term change in students' L2 pronunciation to occur, teachers must follow segmental training giving students conscious awareness of *how* a particular clear vowel is physically articulated with homework activities aimed at developing students' new L2 pronunciation *habits*, as described in the subsection above on "Understanding segmental pronunciation as a habit." After all, it is unreasonable to expect students to have the mental resources necessary to be able both to *consciously* apply their new knowledge of how the various clear vowels of English are pronounced while simultaneously needing to engage in the higher-level cognitive processes of:

1. Comprehending what others are saying;
2. Identifying connections between what others are saying and what they already know;
3. Figuring out semantically what they want to say next; and
4. Figuring out *how* to say it (in terms of information structure, politeness, grammar, etc.)

CHAPTER II

WORD STRESS

Overview

Word stress, also called **lexical stress**, is an important **suprasegmental** feature in English because it determines so many other aspects of pronunciation.

Word Stress

- First, word stress determines which vowels in a word will be pronounced with a **clear vowel** vs. **schwa**.
- Second, word stress impacts the pronunciation of consonants: the unvoiced stop consonants /t/, /p/ and /k/ are pronounced in English with **aspiration** either initially or in stressed syllables, but without aspiration in non-initial unstressed syllables.
- Third, word stress determines which vowel(s) in a word will be pronounced longer vs. shorter, including which vowel gets the primary stress and can therefore be marked with even greater length via focus.
- Fourth, word stress determines which syllable is marked with the highest pitch, lowest pitch or some other distinct pitch change.
- Finally, word stress also determines which syllable, if any, will be marked via increased volume.

How word stress controls a word's intonation contour



(Note: Primary stress is marked via the big bubble, secondary stress via the medium bubble and unstressed syllables via the small bubble)

Word stress errors which do not change **vowel quality** are only minimally damaging – i.e., when a word's primary stressed vowel is instead pronounced with *secondary stress* and vice versa. However, English strongly prefers alternating stressed vs. unstressed syllables. That is, it's very rare for English words to contain two stressed syllables in a row, though exceptions include **compound words** such as “housekeeper” and certain prefixed words like “triangle” and “nonlinear”.

As a result, word stress errors that reduce a word's ordinarily stressed clear vowels to schwa almost always exchange the quality of a word's ordinarily unstressed vowel(s) from schwa to clear. In other words, a word stress error can easily alter the pronunciation of every vowel in a word, a major problem since listeners rely heavily on a word's **vowel template**.

Common Word Stress Errors

- Most word stress errors are made because of modeling a word's pronunciation on one of its more frequent **cognates**.
- Some students' word stress errors are due to modeling their pronunciation on similarly spelled words that are pronounced differently.
 - Students' basic strategy of using the known to figure out the unknown is not the problem. English word stress is highly patterned, as can be seen by searching all words

whose spelling matches a student's problem word from its stressed vowel to the end of the word

- For examples, see:
 - <https://www.morewords.com/most-common-ends-with/alysis/>
 - <https://www.morewords.com/most-common-ends-with/entally/>

Additionally, where ordinarily stressed syllables beginning with /t/, /p/, or /k/ are instead pronounced unstressed, L1 English listeners are likely to hear the those sounds as /d/, /b/, or /g/, respectively. This would negatively impact the listener's ability to find the spoken word in their mental dictionary, which relies heavily on the sounds of consonants, particularly for high **functional load** consonants.

As a result, word stress errors can easily cause listeners to be unable to identify the word the speaker is saying and therefore perhaps unable to identify the boundary between words. Additionally, when speakers put **prominence**, or focus, on a nonstandard vowel within a word because of failing to follow the word's standard word stress pattern, listeners' attention will still be drawn to that word – but what listeners are likely to notice is the word's nonstandard pronunciation, *not* the idea to which the speaker aimed to draw listeners' attention. For example, when a student puts prominence on the word “economics” but pronounces it following the word stress pattern for “economy”.

In sum, word stress errors in English are frequently very damaging because of the disastrous domino effect they put into motion.

Where to Place Stress

Unfortunately, there is no simple rule for determining where the stress falls in a word. However, there are some common features which affect the stress in a word, such as words with prefixes or suffixes, the origin of a word, or the grammatical function. Below is a short list of more common stress patterns found in English.

Words with an affix—a prefix or a suffix—will typically alter the stress pattern of a word. With prefixes, this is a bit easier to determine. If a word contains a prefix, such as pre-, dis-, ex-, re-, over-, under-, etc., a good rule to follow is that the stress will fall on the first syllable of the root word.

For example:

Undo -> un-**DO**
 Overcome -> over-**COME**
 Extend -> ex-**TEND**
 Understand -> un-der-**STAND**

One exception to this pattern, as we've mentioned before, are compound words. That is, when a prefix is attached to a noun in such a way that the resulting word is a noun compound. Notice the above examples—they are all verbs with prefixes attached. When the resulting word is a noun, the stress will be placed on the prefix.

For example:
 Overcoat -> **O**-ver-coat
 Underwear -> **UN**-der-wear
 Output -> **OUT**-put

Understanding the grammatical function of a word is very important when trying to figure out where the stress falls in a word, especially those that have a prefix.

Suffixes are not quite as nice and neat as prefixes. Suffixes often results in one of three stress patterns:

1. They are stress-neutral – that is, they do not affect the placement of stress
2. They cause stress to move to the penult – that is, the stress moves to the second-to-last syllable
3. They cause stress to move to the antepenult – that is, the stress moves to the third-to-last syllable

Stress-neutral suffixes		Penult-shifting suffixes		Antepenult-shifting suffixes	
-dom KING -dom	-er KEEP -er	-cent com- PLA -cent	-cial or -tial ar-ti- FIC -ial	-al in-ter- NA -tio-nal	-cracy de- MOC -ra-cy
-ful BEAU -ti-ful	-hood NEIGH -bor-hood	-cious de- LIC -ious	-ic cli- MAT -ic	-iety so- CI -e-ty	-ify di- VERS -i-fy
-ize U -ti-lize	-less END -less	-tion ed-u- CA -tion	-ctive re-pro- DUC -tive	-ity ac- TIV -i-ty	-icide in- SECT -i-cide

The above table is not a complete list, but should provide a good starting place.

There are also borrowed suffixes from French which demand stress in a word, but these are a bit more rare. One common suffixes borrowed from French which demands stress in a word is NEER, like eng-i-**NEER**.

Other common suffixes borrowed from French that “steal” the stress from a word include:

- -ee (trust-EE)
- -esque (pic-tur-ESQUE)
- -ese (di-o-CESE)
- -ette (kitch-e-NETTE)
- -ique (cri-TIQUE)

Activities



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Additional Activities



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9.

Teacher's Corner

As language instructors, you can let students know that word stress in English is almost always calculated from the *end* of words, not their beginning. So they should model their pronunciation on words that *end* similarly, not *begin* similarly. The key exception is that certain prefixes (e.g., re-, com-, dis-, en-) can push stress from its default position on a word's first syllable to the syllable after, particularly in the case of two-syllable verbs vs. nouns such as "record."

Stress Shift in Verb vs. Noun

Noun

RE-cord



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Verb

re-CORD



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PER-mit



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per-MIT



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Noun**PRE-sent**

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Verb**pre-SENT**

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PRO-ject

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pro-JECT

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Noun PRO-duce	Verb pro-DUCE
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One good way to identify word stress patterns students have not yet mastered is to take notes on any nonstandard pronunciations while students talk through a 10-20 minute presentation or read through several pages from a textbook in their field. Where students' mispronunciations are nonstandard because of word stress, students can be prompted to figure out the word stress error themselves by Googling "most common words ending with [stressed vowel to the end of their problem word]" and then reading aloud the More Words word list that results, e.g., <https://www.morewords.com/most-common-ends-with/anism/>.

Although students generally mis-stress only some words following a given word stress pattern, this technique helps identify other common words following the same word stress pattern to which the student is *not* applying the pattern. This technique allows students' problem with a specific word stress pattern to be addressed all at once, rather than just in terms of a single word in isolation.

- Additionally, for any problem words identified following a particular word stress pattern, exposing students to a sample of 10-15 YouGlish examples of the word being pronounced in context (e.g., <https://youglish.com/search/mechanism>) can be very helpful for demonstrative purposes.
- Once students know the relevant word stress pattern, it is important to automate their production of it by building their habit of pronouncing the word in accord with the standard pattern. Three homework assignments are helpful for accomplishing this task (see Additional Activities).

CHAPTER III

THOUGHT GROUPS

IO.

Overview

Regardless of topic, one of the pronunciation features most influential for enabling an audience to understand what one says is the **suprasegmental** feature of thought grouping. **Thought groups** are so vital because they are the foundation upon which so many other suprasegmental features are built. Thought groups, in general, refer to any discrete stretch of speech that forms a coherent message, and typically...

1. are grammatically and semantically sound;
2. are set off by pauses before and after;
3. include one prominent element (prominence, see Part 4); and
4. have an intonation contour built around that focused element.

It's important to note, though, that there is no one rule-governed method for dividing an utterance into thought groups. A fast speaker may only pause once during an utterance, while a slow speaker could pause up to four times in the same utterance. Listen to the following examples:



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~~The boy saw the MAN / with a TELEscope~~



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You can listen to it online here: <https://iastate.pressbooks.pub/oralcommunication/?p=231>

~~The boy SAW / the man with a TELEscope~~

Notice the difference? Both recordings have two thought groups, but they are not the same. In fact, the meaning of the sentence will probably be interpreted differently by listeners. The first sentence suggests that the boy, *using a telescope*, saw a man; the second suggests that the boy saw *a man who was carrying a telescope*. As noted, thought groups affect the positioning of other suprasegmental features, such as prominence, intonation, and rhythm. Notice which words are prominent in both examples, and how the intonation curve shifts as the prominence shifts.

However, when learning thought groups, there are a handful of grammatical structures which are typically used to express a single thought group:

Grammatical structures generally expressed in a single thought group

- 1) **Article + adjective + noun** (. . .the large molecule. . .)
- 2) **Subordinating conjunction + noun + verb** (. . .because the experiment failed. . .)
- 3) **Preposition + article + noun** (. . .in the graph. . .)
- 4) **Verb + object** (. . .use a dictionary. . .)
- 5) **Relative pronoun + noun + verb** (. . .which she solved. . .)
- 6) **Verb + adverb** (. . .rotated quickly. . .)
- 7) **Article + noun + verb** (. . .the student agreed. . .)
- 8) **Verb + direct object + preposition + indirect object** (. . .hand it to him. . .)

(used by permission from Sandy Peterson, long-time Iowa State University pronunciation instructor)

If you consider the role thought groups play on the positioning and use of other suprasegmentals, you can see how vitally important they are for producing intelligible speech. Using logical thought groups can help a speaker sound more fluent, and it reduces the cognitive load of the listener, which will allow them to better understand your intended message.

Activities

1. Below is a recording device along with six audio recordings. First, listen to an audio recording while following along with the transcript provided above each recording. Then, when you feel ready, use the recording device to record yourself saying the line. Compare your recording with the audio recording. Reflect on how thought groups affect the way which you speak.



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The three largest cities in the United States are New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.



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People are said to think, play, and work at their best when the 24-hour temperatures average between 63 and 73 degrees Fahrenheit.



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Three American holidays in the summer are Memorial Day, The 4th of July, and Labor Day.



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On Groundhog Day, in February, if the groundhog sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter.



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If you break a mirror, then you will have seven years of bad luck, unless you throw the broken pieces into a moving stream.



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Halloween, which in Europe honors the dead, but in the United States celebrates childhood, points to the adoration of youth in America.



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II.

Additional Activities



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Teacher's Corner

Common Problems with Thought Groups

Students commonly have two problems with thought grouping when speaking an L2:

1. Pausing too often or at inappropriate times, or,
2. Not pausing often enough.

When students pause too often, it's usually a result of needing extra time to think of how to say whatever it is they want to say next. Unfortunately, overly-frequent pausing can quickly become a serious problem because it breaks apart speech into illogical groups. This will increase the cognitive load of the listener, which will distract them from understanding the content of the speaker's message. Even though listeners can adjust to these disfluencies rather well, it can become a tiring process after a while. More troubling is that the extra burden placed on the listener can be re-focused back to the speaker in the form of negative assessments of their politeness or intelligence. Therefore, lack of fluency due to poor pausing is a pronunciation issue important to address as soon as possible.

When student do not pause often enough, it's typically a response to the first trouble. That is, students know that pausing too often can break apart their speech in unwanted ways, and so will only pause when absolutely necessary to take a breath. What students needed to understand is that pausing is also a powerful tool for helping listeners distinguish ideas. When speakers rarely pause, listeners must figure out for themselves which ideas connect. This can result not only in listeners struggling to understand what a speaker is trying to say, but also in integrating new information with existing knowledge.

To help, teachers can use written punctuation as a reflection of intonational patterns, which often make finding thoughts groups easier. For example, the period found at the end of a sentence typically signals a falling intonation. While there are certainly exceptions to the rule, it is far more useful to follow the **90/10 rule**.

CHAPTER IV

PROMINENCE

Overview

Prominence, also referred to as “**focus**,” “**phrase stress**,” and “**primary phrase stress**,” describes the pronunciation adjustments English speakers make to focus listeners’ attention on whichever word(s) most contributes to communicating what they are trying to say. For example, when a parent asks a teenager “You did **WHAT**???”

Prominence Refers to How English Speakers:

1. Lengthen the primary stressed vowel in the key words of their message, and,
2. Pronounce these key words at a higher or lower pitch than other less meaningful words.

In spoken English, prominence has the same function as a highlighter does in written English. You would not highlight an entire page of information, but rather key terms or ideas. Prominence plays this same role, but is done so a bit more often. Typically, prominence will find its way into almost every spoken thought group – which word is the most important or adds new information?

Three Key Roles Prominence Play in Spoken English

1. Highlight new or important information
2. To show special or extreme emphasis
3. Contrastive stress

The first category is perhaps the most common use of prominence. This prominence is always used on a content word, and it's used to highlight the most important word(s) in your utterance.

Our earlier example, "You did **WHAT???**", falls under the second category. It is not necessarily that the listener did not hear what the speaker said, but rather they could not *believe* what they heard.

The final category is perhaps the trickiest. Depending on the word which receives prominence in an utterance, the meaning of the utterance can change quite drastically. Take the following for example:

1. I am watching.
2. I **am** watching.
3. I am **watching**.

Can you think of when you might use each of these prominence locations?

Number 1 might be used if someone wants to know what you're doing. For example, if the question is *Who's watching?*, you may respond with the prominence of Number 1.

Number 2 might be used to correct someone. If someone asked you *Why aren't you watching?*, you may respond with Number 2 to correct the speaker. Contrary to the speaker's opinion, you *are* watching.

Number 3 is perhaps the most common of the three, in that it is simply informing someone of what you are doing. For the question *What are you doing?*, you may respond with Number 3.

Typical Prominence

Prominence typically falls on the last word of a sentence or phrase if it is a **noun**, **adjective**, or **verb** (except "BE").

- Nouns:
 - Where are you from?
 - I'm from **Spain**.
 - Is she the teacher?
 - No, she's a student.
- Adjectives:

- He is **nice**.
 - She is very **pretty**.
- Verbs:
 - Where is he going?
 - I don't **know**.
 - What are you doing?
 - I'm **swimming**.

Activities



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I4.

Additional Activities



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15.

Teacher's Corner

By default, English puts focus on the last word of a phrase. If focus is placed anywhere else, listeners will understand it as expressing emphasis. Therefore, when speakers put non-default emphasis on words they do not mean to emphasize, listeners may not successfully identify the speaker's key points.

Particularly if speakers are giving an extended presentation of complex content that is unfamiliar to their audience, this can lead to listeners lacking the processing time necessary for storing these key points. Without standard prominence, listeners quickly tire trying to identify the speaker's main points. If they are unable to process a speaker's message at the speed they hear it, they understandably complain the speaker is "talking too fast."

Prominence is impacted by several things, including:

1. in the case of **emphasis/contrast focus**, the specific words a speaker particularly wants listeners to notice,
2. **thought grouping** (in that thought groups usually contain one focus element) and
3. **word stress** (as determinant of which syllable in a focused word will be most strongly marked with additional vowel length; with the thought group's highest pitch, lowest pitch or point of pitch change; and possibly with an increase in volume.

There are a number of methods for indicating prominence in a sentence or phrase. For example, the question *How do you do?*:

HOW do you **DO**?

How do you do?

Hòw do you dó?

o . . O

How do you do?

All of these different methods are showing the same thing – *How* receives secondary prominence, the first *do* and *you* receive weak prominence, and the second *do* receives the primary prominence.

Some teachers find it beneficial to use the same method they employ in teaching word stress, so that there's an element of consistency in their teaching. Others like to employ two separate methods to highlight the differences between the two suprasegmentals. This is a conversation that you need to have with your learners.

CHAPTER V

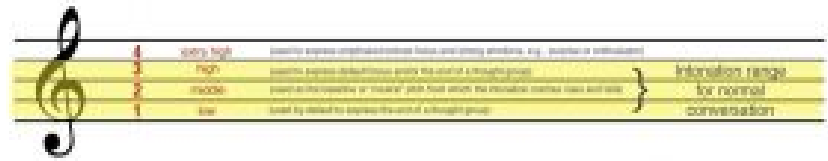
INTONATION

Overview

Intonation is used by L1 English speakers to produce meaning at the phrasal level. While consonants, vowels, and word stress errors can cause a loss of intelligibility at the word level, errors in intonation rarely cause a loss of intelligibility at this level – that is, listeners can understand the words being spoken, but the meaning of the words can be mistaken depending on intonation (especially if there is no intonation pattern at all). When we talk about intonation, we are talking about communicated meaning, which can be either **categorical** or **gradient**.

Speakers of many languages around the world do not indicate grammatical meaning or attitude through intonation, but rather some other language feature (e.g., the grammatical and attitude-marking “suffixes” of Mandarin Chinese). Therefore, many L2 English speakers may have a perception about how much emotion they can appropriately express. Furthermore, since many L2 English speakers’ pitch range is narrower than what L1 American English listeners may expect, these listeners could potentially interpret students’ relatively monotone L2 English as expressing boredom, coldness or even hostility. L1 listeners may also become irritated with certain L2 speakers’ “sing-song” intonation, which would fail to communicate meaning to an L1 listener.

On the other hand, students might interpret the broader pitch range of L1 English speakers as excessively emotional or melodramatic when compared with their L1. This leads to some students being delighted with how changes in their intonational patterns can lead them to sound more like a native speaker, while others find it difficult to break past the norms of their L1.



(Note: It can be helpful pedagogically to present the intonation range of English as characterized by 4 levels of pitch – though musical pitch differs from phonetic pitch in that 1) speakers each have their own baseline or “neutral” phonetic pitch, 2) a certain degree of variation is acceptable as how wide or narrow one’s intonation range is, and 3) speakers glide from one phonetic pitch to another instead of jumping from one distinct note to the next, as in music.)

When we think about intonation, there are three aspects which are important for intelligibility: range, tune, and relative prominence. Range refers to the musical chart above, which has four different levels ranging from 1 (low) to 4 (very high). Tune refers to the direction of the intonation pattern, and is typically said as falling, level, rising, or fall-rise. Finally, relative prominence refers to the word which is receiving the focus, and is typically either weak-strong or strong-weak.

Relative Prominence			
Weak-strong		Strong-weak	
Falling	<div>  <p>An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://iastate.pressbooks.pub/oralcommunication/?p=224</p> </div>		<div>  <p>An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://iastate.pressbooks.pub/oralcommunication/?p=224</p> </div>
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Rising	<div>  <p>An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://iastate.pressbooks.pub/oralcommunication/?p=224</p> </div>		<div>  <p>An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://iastate.pressbooks.pub/oralcommunication/?p=224</p> </div>
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Activities



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17.

Additional Activities



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Teacher's Corner

It is important to first address students' nonstandard intonation in terms of how the student vs. the student's target audience is likely to interpret that intonation. For example, for an L1 English listener, a consistently rising intonation could easily lead them to question a speaker's competence.

Main suggestions

- First discuss the students' nonstandard intonation in terms of who their 1) immediate, 2) primary, and 3) long-term target audience(s) are and how those target audience(s) are likely to interpret students' current intonational norms.
- When students plan to work long-term in **ELF** contexts where calibration toward L1 English intonational norms appears more likely to hurt than to help communication, student resistance to activities targeted at fostering more standard intonation should certainly be respected.
- Also ensure students clearly understand the potential ramifications their L2 English intonational preferences are likely to have on their success in L1-English-context job interviews, professional relationships, etc., which they may decide to pursue in the future.

On the other hand, students may find help via an introduction to how one successfully navigates being able to “flip the switch” from their “native language self” to a slightly different “English self.” Students may also break free of L1-induced interpretations of English intonation as excessively melodramatic and emotional by imagining they are acting in a movie, where a broader intonation range is expected.

Common Intonational Patterns Based on Written Punctuation

1. Period at the end of a sentence = falling intonation
2. Comma at the end of a clause or phrase = steady intonation (or slight rise)
 1. This indicates the speaker is not finished speaking
3. Exclamation points often signal strong emotion = extreme pitch changes

Teaching intonation can make use of lines, as seen in the [Overview](#) section, or sometimes it can help students to see the difference in syllable form. For example, if we use the line “The union’s indivisible, not divisible,” it may look like this:

The ^{un}ion’s ^{IN}divisible / not di^{VI}sible

This method allows the students to see which sounds are involved in particular falls or rises.