

## A student-centred approach to teaching word stress: Applying research findings to the classroom

**Socially Constructed Metalanguage (SCM)** refers to the kind of metalanguage which is needed for effective metalinguistic communication. Such communication, as with all cross-cultural communication, relies on both parties having a common understanding of the concepts which are being discussed. SCM requires the teacher and the learners to work together to construct common ways of talking about these concepts. This involves the teacher in understanding how the learners interpret the sounds of the target language. One way the teacher can do this is by asking learners to describe the difference between two productions. Equally it involves the learners in understanding how the sounds they produce are interpreted by the native speaker. It is social in the sense that it is owned by the class as a group and it refers to the social nature of language learning and the role of social construction of meaning. Once this metalanguage has been developed, it can be used throughout the course for quick and effective feedback. While the term SCM has been developed in relation to teaching pronunciation, it would just as easily apply to the use of explicit instruction in all aspects of language teaching.

**Critical Listening** involves the learner in listening for the contrast between two productions: one which is acceptable and one which is not (Fraser, 2009). Typically there should be a meaningful difference, and ideally it would involve comparing the learner's production when it is acceptable with when it is not. As with SCM, it involves helping learners to understand how the sounds are perceived by the native speaker. It involves a focus on developing speech perception, and learning where the boundaries are between the different phonological categories.

### Lessons from human perception and looking at the stars for teaching pronunciation

Optical illusions	Pronunciation	Star constellations: emu (Fraser 2010b)
<p>How would you explain the difference between the two perspectives in the same picture? Have you ever found that sometimes you just can't see it?</p> <p>When you look at the picture, you first need to understand that there is another way of looking at it. You might see a young lady.</p> <p>I can explain this by saying I see an old lady.</p> <p>However this might not help you to see it, it just tells you to keep looking.</p> <p>I can try and explain what to look for, to see the old woman. (See the explanations on the website) This also doesn't always help, as you need to be able to put the salient lines into the foreground (the figure) and push the other ones into the background. But this can also be hard to do, to look at it from a different angle.</p> <p>So, I need to get you to look closely, and perhaps draw the outline of the old woman, thus bringing it more to the foreground. You may also have think of other ways to make the second perspective clearer to you. Now you should be able to see what the differences are.</p> <p>Of course when you look again later, you may still have difficulty in finding the second perspective.</p>	<p>Explaining pronunciation: especially to learners who need more help</p> <p><b>There is a difference</b></p> <p>As a learner, you need to realise you are being misunderstood. E.g. You might think you are saying "bad", but you are adding an extra vowel making it sound like "badder" I can explain this by saying that to me it sounds like "badder".</p> <p><b>Hearing the difference: where it is</b></p> <p>So now you understand there is a problem, but you might have trouble hearing the difference, because you always think of /d/ as /də/</p> <p>To make it clear where the problem is, I can write it on the board: bad, badder (or badə), underlining the extra vowel.</p> <p><b>Understanding what it is and learning how to say it</b></p> <p>To help you to understand the difference, I can say 'bad/badder' and ask you to describe the difference (You might suggest the /d/ in the first word is shorter or quieter). Then I can ask you to say the two words and I can tell you if they sound the same or different to me (I can tell you to make your /d/ shorter or quieter if you are still adding an extra vowel to 'bad'. Hopefully, you will now start to understand what the problem is.</p> <p>Another way to help you hear the difference is to get you to listen to a model and then record yourself saying 'bad/badder' and then listening to make sure there is a clear difference and that it is the same difference in the model.</p> <p>Because ways of thinking about sounds are deeply entrenched, it will take a great deal of practice and feedback to be able to automatically produce the accurate pronunciation.</p>	<p>The stars are real (like phonetics), but the lines between them are imaginary. Constellations (like phonology) are projections onto a continuous array of stars. "Words and phonemes are projections of our minds onto a continuous stream of sound"</p> <p>How to teach someone a new constellation</p> <p>Direct the learner's attention to the right part of the sky.</p> <p>Establish several landmarks which both the teacher and learner can recognise. This takes a lot of negotiation to make sure both teacher and learner are referring to the same things.</p> <p>These landmarks can be used to describe the shape in a way that the learner will understand. This requires ongoing dialogue.</p> <p>Next time you go out the sky will look different so it will take several lessons, and aids such as maps will be necessary. Eventually the constellation will become immediately obvious.</p>

<b>Overview of lessons on word stress: Steps described within each part of lesson followed by student action</b>
<b>Day One: Part One (worksheet 1) Exploration of cross-linguistic concepts of syllables and stress</b>
Introductions: Graeme, how many parts? Students raise awareness of syllables in English
Kereama: How many parts in your names? Students raise cross-linguistic awareness of differences in the concept of a syllable.
Graeme: describing the difference between the syllables. How prominence is realised: Students raise awareness of word stress in English.
Kereama: describing the difference between the syllables. How prominence is realised: Students raise cross-linguistic awareness of differences in the concept of word stress.
<b>Day One: Part Two (worksheet 2/3): 2 syllable words</b>
<b>Listen</b> to examples of correct/incorrect word stress (taken from diagnostics): Students listen and compare, discuss how they hear the differences. Compare with other languages. Conclusion: 2 things – where and how
<b>Reinforce</b> listening with ordering and discussion: Students organise words above in stress patterns. Notice fronting of nouns.
<b>Speaking practice:</b> Students work in pairs to practise saying the words, giving each other feedback, teacher gives feedback
<b>Practice in context:</b> S's make up sentences, record, listen and compare (in computer lab). Teacher and peers give feedback
<b>Day One: Part Three (worksheet 4-6): 3 syllable words</b>
<b>Listen</b> to examples of correct/incorrect word stress (taken from diagnostics): Students listen and compare, discuss how they hear the differences. Compare with other languages. Listen again for how the unstressed vowels sound. Listen through online dictionary. Conclusion: the stressed syllables are stronger, the vowels in the unstressed ones change and become very short.
<b>Reinforce</b> listening with ordering and discussion: Students organise words above according to stress patterns.
<b>Speaking practice:</b> S's work in pairs to practise saying the words, giving each other feedback, teacher also provides feedback
<b>Practice in context:</b> Students make up sentences (hwk for day 2) record, listen and compare. Teacher and peers give feedback
<b>Day 2: (Part 3 cont'd)</b>
<b>Group discussion and feedback on recordings:</b> Students record, listen and compare. Teacher and peers give feedback
<b>Role play:</b> 2 groups choose the applicant: seemed to go well.
<b>Part Four: Secondary stress: (worksheet 7/8)</b>
Listen to examples of correct/incorrect word stress (taken from diagnostics): Students listen and compare, discuss how they hear the differences. Compare with other languages. Listen again for how the unstressed vowels sound. Listen through online dictionary. Guess place of primary and secondary stress Conclusion: the stressed syllables are stronger, the vowels in the unstressed ones change and become very short, but some stay the same length and some have some stress.
<b>Looking for patterns, controlled speaking practice:</b> Listen to and record verb noun pairs, notice the patterns. (weak syllable between primary and secondary, primary before suffix, primary becomes secondary)
<b>Further practice</b> (examples from AWL): Students make up sentences using words they have chosen, then record themselves.
Nouns and adjectives with other suffixes: Students make up more pairs and record them.
<b>Part Five: Bringing it all together (worksheet 9-10)</b>
<b>Day 3, begins with finishing off recording from day 2, teacher giving feedback.</b>
<b>Preparation for discussion topic:</b> Auckland transport. Key words and sentences recorded on voiceboard to provide a model: Students can record words and phrases from the model, then listen and compare, get feedback from teacher. Students make up their own phrases, add other words they might want to use, record and listen, get feedback.
<b>Group discussions:</b> solve Auckland's transport problems.
<b>Part Six: Group perceptions of word stress</b>
<b>Further group discussion:</b> how you would explain word stress to someone else who has the same first language as you: First students make notes about the differences between word stress in English and other languages, the most difficult thing about understanding English word stress and best ways to improve use of word stress.

## References

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