

# Teaching Perception of Suprasegmentals Using Popular Media

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# Presentation Outline

- Presentation Goals
- Definition of Suprasegmentals
- Our Motivation
- Brief Explanation of the 3 Ps
- Criteria for Selecting Materials
- Demonstration of Activities



# Presentation Goal

- Demonstrate effective methods for teaching perception and production of suprasegmentals



# Linking

- Definition:

Connection of sounds between words  
in fast speech.

- Example:

**My aunt is named Rachel.**



# Trimming

- Definition:

Deletion of sounds in fast speech,  
including contractions.

- Example:

**Isn't he going?**



# Blending

- Definition:

Coarticulation of /t,d,s,z/ with /y/

- Examples:

**I know that you're afraid.**

**Did you miss your bus?**



# Message Units (MU)

a.k.a. thought groups, etc.

- Definition:

**Smallest unit of spoken discourse,**  
identified at each boundary by a pause.

- Example:

What did you teach while you were there?

**I taught math / and physics for one year.**

**I taught math and physics for one year.**



# Alternating Rhythm

- Definition:

**Alternation between stressed and unstressed words/ syllables inside MUs**

- Example:

**we wENT to the stORE.**

**we bOUGHT banANas.**



# Primary Phrase Stress (PPS)

a.k.a. main stress, etc.

- Definition:

**Most prominent stress in a MU**

- Example:

**we went to the stORE.**

**we bought banANas (there).**



# Our Motivation


- Teach features that are important for comprehension and intelligibility

(Derwing et al., 2003)

- Use materials that are authentic and motivate students (Hadley, 2001)

- Add variety to existing lesson plans

- Encourage students to become independent language learners



# The 3 Ps

- Prediction

- Application of rules and patterns

- Perception

- Ability to hear English stress and rhythm

- Production

- Accurate pronunciation of English suprasegmentals


(Hahn & Dickerson, 1999)



# Criteria for Selecting Materials

- Appropriately authentic
- Contain salient examples of pronunciation features in focus
- Relate to classroom content
- Content is appropriate for age/proficiency of students
- Observe fair use and copyright rules

<http://employees.csbsju.edu/esass/internetlessoncriteria.htm>



# Rhythm in *The Matrix*

## ■ Objectives / Rationale

- Students practice predicting and perceiving target pronunciation features.
- Use of these features is critical for production of English rhythm.
- Ability to perceive these features aids students' comprehension.



# *The Matrix*

- Prerequisites


- Students have general understanding of the target features, based on materials presented in previous classes.



## *The Matrix*

### ■ Procedures

- Ss mark their predictions on the transcript.
- Play the audio file twice. Students mark in a different color pen what they hear the speaker do.
- Discuss: Where are your predictions correct? Where did the speaker do something different? Can you explain why?
- Play the file again, repeating certain phrases as needed, so students can hear the target.



# Message Units in MLK's *"I Have a Dream"*

- Objectives / Rationale
  - Students practice predicting, perceiving, and producing message units.
  - Use of message units is critical for production of English rhythm.
  - Ability to perceive message units aids students' comprehension.



# MLK's *"I Have a Dream"*

- Prerequisites

- Students have a general understanding of message units, based on materials presented in previous classes.



# MLK's "*I Have a Dream*"

## ■ Procedure

- Ss mark their predictions for message units on the transcript.
- Play the audio file twice. Students mark in a different color pen what they hear the speaker do.
- Discuss: Where are your predictions correct? Where did the speaker do something different? Can you explain why?
- Play the file again, repeating certain phrases as needed, so students can hear the target.



# Student-Developed Materials

- Objectives / Rationale
  - Students practice self-directed learning by creating their own version of suprasegmental practice materials
- Prerequisites
  - Completion of in-class perception and production activities



# Student Developed Materials

**Step 1:** Ss browse the Internet for a lecture which contains a topic of interest to them (i.e. physics, chemistry, computer science, etc).

**Step 2:** Ss transcribe, word-for-word, 1 or 2 minutes of speech from the lecture.

**Step 3:** Ss choose one aspect of the speaker's pronunciation to concentrate on (i.e. message units, rhythm, primary phrase stress, linking, trimming, etc.).

**Step 4:** Ss mark transcriptions with predictions.

**Step 5:** Using a clean transcription, Ss mark the actual productions of the speaker.

**Step 6:** Ss post their transcriptions, along with a link to the audio/ video file on a class web site.



# Student Feedback

- All students said the activity helped them understand more about message units
- All said they would like to do another, similar activity



# Student Feedback

- “I think I need more ‘examples’ to learn not from textbook”
- “I am wondering if this is a normal way to speak. I mean maybe people don’t speak like giving a speech usually”
- “Message units is not fixed to rules, it depends on the purpose of the speaker”



# Student Feedback

- “Increases my awareness in perception.”
- “Provided real life examples of what we learn in class.”
- “The stress is used obviously everywhere, and so is alternating rhythm.”



# Student Suggestions

- Use video also.
- Have us listen and transcribe before seeing script.
- Have us read and repeat out loud what we heard.



# Main Points

- Popular media can provide authentic and salient examples of important English suprasegmentals
- Students learn to apply prediction rules inside and outside the classroom
- Teachers can adapt lesson plan formats to focus on diverse targets and themes



# References

Criteria for Selecting and/or Evaluating Lessons that Use the Internet.

<http://employees.csbsju.edu/esass/internetlessoncriteria.htm>.

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# Thank you!

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