

What Teachers Need to Do

To get ready to teach pronunciation, a teacher's first task is to locate a good selection of language samples that will be appropriate for the proficiency level of the class. Though a combination of both written and oral language samples is recommended, in this book I focus on ways of working with written samples because written texts serve as centerpieces for ESL/EFL teaching in most classrooms worldwide. If the course is already focused on pronunciation, the students' textbook may contain plenty of promising language samples. Many teachers, however, want to be able to include at least some attention to pronunciation in courses that are not pronunciation focused. Some very good news is that even in more broadly focused courses, potentially useful language samples are all around us.

An appropriate language sample for teaching pronunciation may be as uncomplicated as an introductory dialogue from a beginning-level EFL text or as challenging as a transcript of an academic lecture from an advanced-level listening for academic purposes text. All such materials can be useful, depending on the characteristics of the language sample and learners' level of proficiency. We should also think about the length, in number of words, of a potential language sample. For courses geared toward lower proficiency levels, texts between 50 and 170 words are probably long enough. This would be the typical length of dialogues and paragraphs often featured in lower-level EFL texts. The Airplane Aisle Incident narrative is just under 190 words and suggests that texts between 170 and 250 words are appropriate for intermediate-level classes. Students at high-intermediate and advanced

levels of proficiency may work with language samples that are considerably longer. Higher-level courses may also begin to incorporate a mix of written texts accompanied by audio recordings (e.g., transcripts of interviews, radio broadcasts, lectures). Here are some steps to follow prior to pronunciation teaching:

- Find language samples of appropriate length that meet learners' needs.
- Include samples of written language that feature at least some characteristics of spoken discourse.
- Consider both commercially published and self-generated language samples.
- Include source materials from different media (e.g., books, Internet, radio, TV).
- Prioritize language samples featured in the class textbook.

In addition to written texts, samples of spoken language generated live in the classroom can also be used. Approaches to language teaching, such as the direct method, language experience approach, and Community Language Learning, feature procedures for transcribing samples of spoken language generated live in the classroom. More conventionally, most ESL and EFL textbooks, even those designed to teach integrated skills, reading, writing, or grammar, include either scripted simulations of speech or prose selections that can be very effective as supports for pronunciation teaching. Radio podcasts such as National Public Radio's *Fresh Air* and *StoryCorps* are appropriate as long as the content has been screened for suitability. Alternatively, it is a good idea to sometimes use language samples you have generated on your own (e.g., the Airline Aisle Incident). In sum, the first step in preparing to teach pronunciation is to locate an appropriate number of language samples (e.g., one or more per week) that are relevant to students' level of proficiency, of sufficient length, and interesting enough to both capture and maintain student interest.

REFLECTIVE BREAK

- Which of the following do you think are more important to include as core language samples when teaching pronunciation: dialogues, monologues, narratives; scripted, semiscritped, or authentic language samples; excerpts from lectures, podcasts, textbooks, screenplays, novels, TV interviews, radio shows, EAP listening materials?
- In an ESL/EFL textbook you are currently using, locate two to three sections that provide potentially useful language samples. What characteristics are you considering?

Preparing Language Samples

Once you have identified a language sample, you need to decide if it will be more helpful as either a *general* or a *core* language sample. General language samples can be used as they are. Typically, these are brief sections from students' textbooks used to introduce, illustrate, and reinforce the concept of thought grouping or other pronunciation features. In contrast, core samples require more preparation because they will serve as centerpieces for instruction. A large concern is that core language samples need to be reformatted ahead of time. As you experienced with the Airplane Aisle Incident narrative, the idea is to reformat core samples so that all punctuation has been removed. In most instances, this means retyping them and saving them as electronic files. Language samples from a textbook also need to be retyped and reformatted; otherwise the removal of punctuation is impossible. Because students will be marking them up extensively, double-spacing is recommended. The remainder of this book prioritizes core language samples for purposes of pronunciation teaching. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that general samples from students' textbooks are also useful. In short, once core language samples have been identified, the teacher needs to retype them in order to render them punctuation-free.

Introducing the Language Sample in Class

Once a core language sample is in place, the next question is: How will I present it to the class? Sometimes a combination of audio and written versions is needed, although for shorter and less complicated texts a teacher might simply read the language sample aloud to the class. For teachers interested in exposing learners to the voices of different English speakers, audio recordings may also be used. For most activities a written version is required because students will be analyzing it closely to be able to work on pronunciation features. Some possibilities for presenting language samples include the following:

- Everyone gets a photocopy (preferred).
- A copy is projected at the front of the room (e.g., overhead, PowerPoint).
- Students create their own written version through teacher-fronted listening dictation or dicto-comp activities.²
- Other classroom procedures such as information gaps, jigsaw procedures, strip sentences, and cloze exercises may also be used.

REFLECTIVE BREAK

- Why might punctuation-free language samples be more useful than conventional texts?
- What would be your preferred way of presenting a core language sample in class?

² Dicto-comp is a technique in which the teacher reads a language sample aloud and students write out what they understand and remember while trying to keep as close as possible to the original.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on tasks a classroom teacher needs to complete ahead of time to prepare for pronunciation teaching. The three tasks are to (1) locate language samples relevant to learners' needs, (2) create versions that are punctuation-free, and (3) decide how to present them in class. These preparatory steps are necessary so that students will be able to work closely with useful samples of English as a basis for pronunciation work. When looking for appropriate language samples, the best ones are written texts that reflect at least some of the characteristics of spoken English. The next chapter explains how students can be guided in the productive use of such core language samples.