

Phonology in the classroom

Teachers often find it difficult to apply phonology in the classroom, particularly with lower levels. A good starting point is 'stress' as students can relate relatively easily to this e.g.

With countries and nationalities:

Japan - o O Peru - o O Africa - O o o America - o O o o
 Japanese - o o O Peruvian - o O o o African - O o o American - o O o o etc.

This could be done initially in the form of an activity with cards of different sizes to show what the word sound like e.g.

 - Africa

a matching activity, pelmanism, mix and mingle e.g.

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Japan | o O |
|-------|-----|

Or where the words are put into the appropriate categories e.g.

| | | | | |
|--------|---------|-------|----------|-------|
| O o o | o O o o | o O | O o | O o o |
| Africa | America | Japan | Scotland | Italy |

Focusing on the stress of words with more syllables and highlighting this on the w/b will provide the students with an accurate model and avoid ingrained error occurring.

If we analyse what happens to the vowel sound in these words we notice that the stressed syllables are emphasised and the mouth is opened more the non-stressed symbols or 'weak forms' instead all have the 'schwa' sound. This leads us naturally into the introduction of the phonemic script; starting with the 'schwa'.

/ə/

This is a very common sound in our language and raising the students' awareness to this will help them with both their own pronunciation and their understanding when listening.

You could begin by asking the students to find the words containing /ə/
e.g.

Put the words into two groups one group with /ə/ and the other without.

| | | | | | |
|--------|------------|--------|----------|------|--------|
| again | play | mother | question | what | answer |
| camera | cat | flower | table | take | have |
| banana | understand | apple | | | |

This could then lead your students quite naturally into recognizing the 'schwa' in short sentences e.g. 'a cup of tea and a piece of cake, please', which they could be asked to highlight or underline.

This would obviously be helpful when focusing on longer sentence stress at a later stage.

Once the 'schwa' has been understood it is quite easy to introduce other vowel sounds e.g. / æ / / e / / a: /

It is helpful to demonstrate where and how the sound is produced, either through diagrams or pictures or by producing the sound yourself.

e.g.

Now would also be a good time to start working on minimal pairs.

e.g. put the words in the correct column

| / I: / | / I / |
|--------|-------|
| leave | live |

Bit - beat hit - heat ship - sheep sit - seat

Slip - sleep fit - feet still - steal etc.

Once they have acquired a few sound this could take the form of a mix and mingle where students find a partner with a word that has the same sound e.g. hit - bit, cat - hat, pet - yet etc.

You could also dictate a list of these to the students, who then check to see if they have taken down the right words. The students could then dictate a similar list to each other and compare after.

At this point you will be able to introduce some simple consonants and get the students to decipher words from the phonemic script e.g.

- 1) /ʃ^ t/
- 2) / m æ p/
- 3) / k I:p/
- 4) / ð gen/

etc.

Other consonants and vowel sounds could be presented as they come up in the context that you are teaching e.g. the sound connected to 'th' when working on 'both this and that or these and those. The difference can be demonstrated to the students by placing a piece of paper or feather in front of your mouth with the unvoiced sound and your hand on your throat to feel the vibrations in the case of the voiced sound.

Voiced and unvoiced sounds can also be linked to the plural forms the verb and third person in the present simple or the past tense with regular verbs e.g.

/bʌks/ /geɪmz/ /wɒtʃɪz/

/pleɪz/ /helps/

/wɜːkt/ /lʌkt/ /wɒntɪd/ /pleɪd/ etc

Minimal Pairs

Put the words in the correct column

| / i: / | / i / |
|--------|-------|
| leave | live |

Bit - beat - hit - heat - ship - sheep - sit - seat

Slip - sleep - fit - feet

Now try these:

Please - keep - miss - him - trees - keys - me - tin - still -
cream - tea - she

Which words contain the 'schwa' sound ?

again

play

mother

question

what

camera

cat

flower

table

take

have

answer

sentence

parents

make

banana

understand

apple

can

Sentence stress

How many different meanings can you give to the following sentence:

‘This is my wife.’

Consider the following dialogue:

A: Introduce me to your daughter. B: This is my wife.

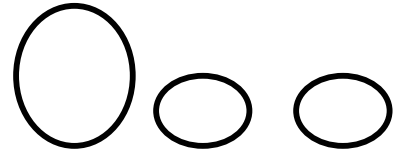
A: This isn't your wife? B: This is my wife.

Your wife's the woman over there, isn't she?

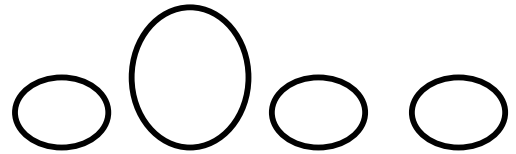
B: This is my wife.

A: So, this is John's wife. B: This is my wife.

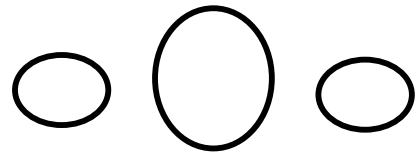
Newspaper



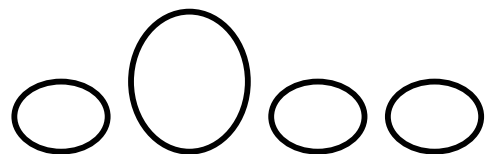
Unfortunate



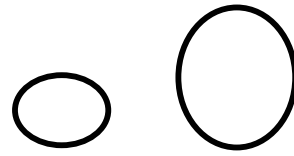
illegal



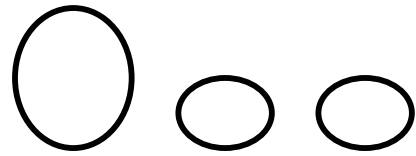
Photographer



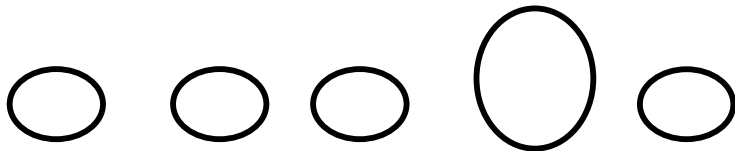
Japan



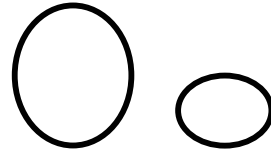
Sausages



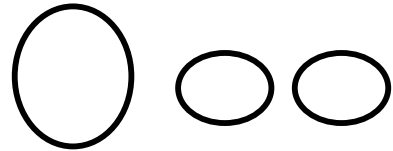
Accommodation



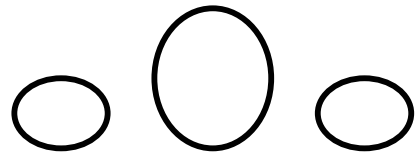
blackbird



specialist



infectious



comfortable

