

A Mouthful of Air: Integrating Pronunciation into Everyday Teaching

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A white blackbird?

Aim: To develop awareness of phrases and compounds which are distinguished by their stress patterns.

Preparation: Make copies of the handout (see box)

Procedure:

- 1 Write on the board: a black bird a blackbird

Ask the class what the difference is. If they don't know, add stress markings:

A black bird a blackbird

- 2 If this doesn't help, say the two items yourself, making the different stress patterns clear.

Answer: A black bird is any bird which is black in colour. A blackbird is a *species* of bird. (Immature blackbirds and female blackbirds are brown. There are also albino [white] blackbirds.)

- 3 Distribute the handout to the learners: they find the difference between the items in each pair (they may need a dictionary). They try to formulate a generalisation about these differences.

- 4 Answer: The answers on the *left*, with stress on the second element, are simply phrases consisting of an adjective plus a noun, and mean exactly what they appear to mean:

A blue bell is a bell which is blue in colour. A wet suit is a suit which is wet, and so on.

The items on the *right*, with stress on the first element, are compound nouns, and have meanings which in most cases are not immediately apparent.

Extension: The learners can work in pairs, asking and answering questions such as:

Would you rather have a hot dog or a hot dog? Why?

Is our teacher an English teacher or an English teacher, or both?

Which would probably be most comfortable to live in – a green house or a greenhouse?

What's the difference between:

A blue bell and a bluebell?

A black berry and a blackberry?

A white board and a whiteboard?

A tall boy and a tallboy?

A hot dog and a hotdog?

A short fall and a shortfall?

A green house and a greenhouse?

A white house and the White House?

Orange juice and orange juice?

A short list and a shortlist?

A dark room and a darkroom?

An English teacher and an English teacher?

A wet suit and a wetsuit?

Adapted from Marks and Bowen *The Book of Pronunciation* (Delta)

Who does what?

Aim: To practise a typical stress pattern in compounds, in the context of a lexical set.

Preparation: You'll need a list of questions to elicit names of jobs, such as the one in the box below. All the jobs should be two-part compounds with stress on the first element. Make copies of the list.

Procedure:

- 1 Ask 'Who drives a taxi?' to elicit 'A taxi driver'. Write 'taxi driver on the board and point out that it is a two-part compound noun (noun + noun) with stress on the *first* part but not on the *second*. Make sure the learners can pronounce it with this stress pattern.
- 2 Tell them you are going to ask them questions about the names of other jobs which are also two-part nouns with the same stress pattern. Read out your list of questions. Make sure the answers given are the correct names of the jobs and are pronounced with the correct stress. In a large class you might want to nominate individuals to reply. You could then ask *other* individuals to repeat the answer – to maximise the amount of practice.
- 3 Now hand out the list of questions to the learners. They go through the list in pairs. They take turns to ask and answer. Circulate, making sure the correct stress pattern is used.

Extension

The learners may well be able to suggest other similar job names. You could also ask them to find more as a homework task. They could even *invent* jobs – e.g. an elephant inspector, a name collector, a brain cleaner ...

PS Job names are only one group of such compounds. In two-part compound nouns, the stress is usually on the first element. They can be written in three different ways: as a single word; as two separate words; with a hyphen.

Remind your learners that in English the first part of a compound is singular.

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Who sells books? | 2 Who fights fires? | 3 Who drives buses? |
| 4 who cleans windows? | 5 Who works in an office? | 6 Who teaches in a school? |
| 7 Who sings operas? | 8 Who writes scripts? | 9 Who collects refuse? |
| 10 Who plays tennis? | 11 Who inspects tickets? | 12 Who tells stories? |
| 13 Who mines coal? | 14 Who deals in antiques? | 15 Who writes songs? |
| 16 Who tells fortunes? | 17 Who owns a factory? | 18 Who produces films? |
| 19 Who travels through time? | 20 Who performs surgery on brains? | |

Key

- 1 a bookseller 2 a firefighter 3 a bus driver 4 a window cleaner 5 an office worker
 6 a schoolteacher 7 an opera singer 8 a scriptwriter 9 a refuse collector 10 a tennis player
 11 a ticket inspector 12 a storyteller 13 a coal miner 15 a songwriter
 16 a fortune-teller 17 a factory owner 18 a film producer 19 a time traveller
 20 a brain surgeon

Adapted from Marks and Bowen *The Book of Pronunciation* (Delta)

If only

Aim: To practise recognition and production of a typical intonation pattern in the construction of *if only*

Level: Higher levels

Preparation: Make copies of the handout.

Procedure:

- 1 Write on the board: *You didn't tell me you were coming today: If only*
- 2 Invite the class to complete the sentence: *If only you'd told me you were coming today.*
- 3 Invite the learners to say it.
- 4 Say it yourself (or play the recording) and ask the learners to practise it - with particular attention to the intonation.:
 - A high-pitched secondary stress (non-tonic prominence) on *only*
 - A falling tone on the main stress (tonic prominence) on *today*.
- 5 Explain that this intonation pattern is typical in sentences with *If only ...*
 - A high-pitched secondary stress (non-tonic prominence) on *only*
 - Main stress with a fall on an important word later in the sentence
- 6 Distribute the handout. Learners convert the sentences using *If only...* (possibly after some quick revision of the grammatical conversion). Monitor and check.
- 7 They decide where to put the main stress. They then practise saying them.
- 8 Elicit answers from the class. Finally, play the recording again (or read them out as indicated in the transcript)
- 9 Learners practise them again.

Extension:

- 1 The learners work in pair. Learner A says one of the sentences on the handout. Learner B converts it into an *If only ...* sentence. They then swap.
- 2 They also make true *If only ...* sentences about themselves (and their partner can ask follow-up questions e.g.
 - A: *If only I'd learnt how to play the piano!*
B: *Why didn't you?*
A: *Because*

PS This exercise presupposes an initial familiarity with *If only* and the choice of verb form following it.

Adapted from Marks and Bowen, *The Book of Pronunciation*, Delta, 2012

If only

- 1 We can't start again.
- 2 I picked the phone up.
- 3 We don't live in the country.
- 4 I didn't know what was going to happen.
- 5 They expect us to reply immediately.
- 6 You can't come with us.
- 7 People dump rubbish everywhere.
- 8 You couldn't take part.
- 9 They didn't let us know in advance.
- 10 I didn't read the instructions.

Marks and Bowen, *The Book of Pronunciation*, Delta, 2012

Transcript: Track 82

Example

If only you'd told me you were coming today.

1 If only we could start again

2 If only I hadn't picked the phone up.

3 If only we lived in the country.

4 If only I'd known what was going to happen.

5 If only they didn't expect us to reply immediately.

6 If only you could come with us.

7 If only people didn't dump rubbish everywhere.

8 If only you could have taken part.

9 If only they'd let us know in advance.

10 If only I'd read the instructions.

Marks and Bowen, *The Book of Pronunciation*, Delta, 2012

I did tell you

Aim: To provide practice in stressing auxiliary verbs for contrastive purposes.

Levels: Higher.

Materials: Make copies of the materials in the two boxes.

Procedure:

1 Write this exchange on the board:

A: Why didn't you tell me you had to work on Saturday?

B: I did tell you. I told you last week.

2 Invite your learners to read it aloud, paying particular attention to stress and intonation.

3 Read out the exchange (or play the recording if you have it) and ensure the following:

- Main stress is on tell in the first line and on did and week in the second line.
- Falling intonation in all three cases.

A: Why didn't you tell me you had to work on Saturday?

B: I did tell you. I told you last week.

4 The learners practice this exchange in pairs:

- They concentrate on stressing the three underlined words.
- They concentrate on not stressing the rest.

5 Distribute the handout. Tell the learners that the exchanges have similar stress and intonation:

- One main stress in the first line
- Main stress on the auxiliary verb in the first part of the second line.
- A further main stress later in the second line.

Ask them to fill in the blanks and mark where they think the stresses will be, while you circulate and check that they are on the right lines.

- 6 Play the recording or read out the exchanges for learners to check what they have done.
- 7 Hand out the completed transcript of the recording so they can listen again.
- 8 Finally, they work in pairs, reading the exchanges aloud, with a focus on stress and intonation.

Extension

1 The learners continue to work in pairs, taking turns to be A and B.

- A, looking at the handout, reads one of the first lines.
- B, *not* looking at the handout, replies, either exactly as in the handout, or giving a similar response with a stressed auxiliary.

2 They can practise further by asking each other similar *Why...+ auxiliary* questions about things they know are not true. You can also ask them such questions in subsequent lessons.

PS Auxiliary *be* and *have*, and modal auxiliaries, are more often unstressed than stressed. This activity practises both stressed and unstressed forms.. For example:

I was /wɒz/ working. I was /wəz / working from home.

In examples such as these, forms of the auxiliary *do* are stressed for contrast – even though there is no corresponding unstressed *do* in the follow-on sentences:

I did tell you. I (~~did~~ tell) told you last week.

Example

A: *Why didn't you tell me you had to work on Saturday?*

B: *I did tell you. I told you last week.*

1 A: *Why don't you open on Sundays?*

B: We _____ open on Sundays. We're open from ten till four.

2 A: *Why weren't you working this afternoon?*

B: I _____ working. I was working from home.

3 A: *Why aren't you coming to the party?*

B: I _____ coming. I' _____ arriving a bit later on.

4 A: *Why won't you help me to carry all this stuff?*

B: I _____ help you. I _____ be with you in a minute.

5 A: *Why doesn't the boss like the proposal?*

B: She _____ like it. But she wants more details.

6 A: *Why isn't this radio working?*

B: It _____ but you've got to plug it in first.

7 A: *Why aren't all the students here?*

B: They _____ here. They _____ out in the garden.

8 A: Why wouldn't you like to go to Australia?

B: I _____ like to. I _____ go if it wasn't so expensive.

9 A: Why hasn't he sent a CV?

B: He _____ sent one. It must be here somewhere.

10 A: Why can't I use this ticket?

B: You _____ use it. You _____ use it any time between eight and ten.

Adapted from Marks and Bowen, *The Book of Pronunciation*, Delta, 2012

Example

A: *Why didn't you tell me you had to work on Saturday?*

B: *I did tell you. I told you last week.*

1 A: Why don't you open on Sundays?

B: We do open on Sundays. We're open from ten till four.

2 A: Why weren't you working this afternoon?

B: I was working. I was working from home.

3 A: Why aren't you coming to the party?

B: I am coming. I'm arriving a bit later on.

4 A: Why won't you help me to carry all this stuff?

B: I will help you. I'll be with you in a minute.

5 A: Why doesn't the boss like the proposal?

B: She does like it. But she wants more details.

6 A: Why isn't this radio working?

B: It is working, but you've got to plug it in first.

7 A: Why aren't all the students working?

B: They are working. They 're working out in the garden.

8 A: Why wouldn't you like to go to Australia?

B: I would like to. I 'd go if it wasn't so expensive.

9 A: Why hasn't he sent a CV?

B: He has sent one. It must be here somewhere.

10 A: Why can't I use this ticket?

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Adapted from Marks and Bowen, *The Book of Pronunciation*, Delta, 2012

To contract - or not?

Aim: Developing awareness of contracted and uncontracted forms, and when they are used.

Level: Pre-Intermediate (A2/B1) upwards

Preparation: Make copies of the material in the box opposite, or prepare something similar – with all potential contractions underlined but written out *in full*.

Procedure:

1 Distribute the handout to the learners:

- They focus on the underlined sections.
- They decide whether or not they are *likely* to be contracted.

The word 'likely' is important: in some cases, both contracted and full (uncontracted) forms would be *possible*.

2 The learners read some of the dialogues aloud, complete with contractions.

3 They then listen to the recording (or you read the transcript out loud) and check whether they made the same decisions as the speakers.

4 Finally, ask them if they can make any generalisations about when contractions and full forms are used in conversation. With your guidance, they should arrive at the following conclusions:

- Contractions are used much, much more often than full forms.
- Full forms are used at the end of a clause (e.g. in number 4, and *He has* in number 6), except that contractions with *-n't* can be used here.
- Full forms are used when stressed for emphasis (e.g. in number 8).

PS *To contract* is the default option in spoken English, except at the end of a clause (see above). Full forms are associated with particular emphasis, or with a generally careful or emphatic style of speaking.

- From a *listening* point of view, practice in recognising contracted forms is important.
- For the learners' own speech, using full forms have the advantage of making it easier for a listener to identify the words spoken. However, the listener can easily get the impression that the full forms are being stressed – and this can cause uncertainty as to the exact meaning intended.

- 1 A More?
- B No thanks. I have had plenty.
- 2 A There is plenty of cheese in the fridge.
- B I could not see any.
- 3 A I hope I will see you at the meeting tomorrow.
- B I am afraid I will not be there.
- 4 A You must be pleased with the results.
- B I am.

- 5 A I wish you had been there.
 B I just could not spare the time.
- 6 A Have you been here before?
 B He has, but she has not.
- 7 A You need not stay, if you have got things to do.
 B I think I will be off, then.
- 8 A I thought you were in London today.
 B I am in London. That is where I am phoning from.
- 9 A Look over there – what has happened?
 B I think there has been an accident.
- 10 A Here we are. This is the place
 B I did not think it would take us so long to get here.

Poem A For Anne by Leonard Cohen:

With Annie gone,
 whose eyes to compare
 with the morning sun?

Not that I did compare,
 But I do compare
 Now that she's gone.

Transcript: Track 64

- 1 A More?
B No thanks. I 've had plenty.
- 2 A There's plenty of cheese in the fridge.
B I couldn't see any.
- 3 A I hope I'll see you at the meeting tomorrow.
B I'm afraid I won't be there.
- 4 A You must be pleased with the results.
B I am.
- 5 A I wish you'd been there.
B I just couldn't spare the time.
- 6 A Have you been here before?
B He has, but she hasn't.
- 7 A You needn't stay, if you've things to do.
B I think I'll be off, then.
- 8 A I thought you were in London today.
B I am in London. That's where I'm phoning from.
- 9 A Look over there – what's happened?
B I think there's been an accident.
- 10 A Here we are. This is the place.
B I didn't think it'd take us so long to get here.

Adapted from Marks and Bowen: *The Book of Pronunciation*, Delta, 2012

Shadowing

TRANSCRIPT 1

A Listen! ... BA 516 to Geneva. That's our flight.

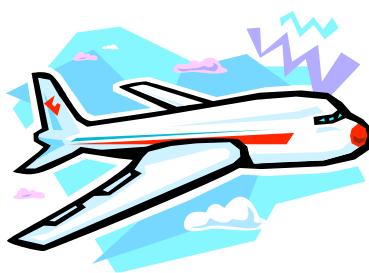
B Did the announcement say Gate 4 or 14?

A I couldn't hear. I think it said 4.

B Look! There it is on the departure board. It is gate 4 .

A OK. Come on! Let's go.

From: New Headway Elementary p 113



TAPESCRIPT 2

A **LISten!** ... BA 516 to GenEva. That's our **FLIGHT**.

B Did the an**NOUN**cement say Gate **FOUR** or **fourTEEN**?

A I couldn't **HEAR**. I think it said **FOUR**.

B **LOOK!** **THERE** it is | on the de**PART**ure board. It **IS** Gate 4 .

A **OK.** Come **ON!** Let's **GO**.

STAGES

- 1 Practice the listening skill as per normal. Ensure that your learners have no trouble understanding the text.
- 2 Play a line or two of the recording and allow the learners to take it in: leave silence.
- 3 Ask them to replay the line/s in their heads.
- 4 Ask them to mumble the lines all together, but to themselves rather than in a chorus pronunciation drill.
- 5 Play the recording again.
- 6 Learners work on the transcript for pronunciation. They predict:
 - a) Divisions into chunks
 - b) Primary stress in each chunk
- 7 Learners listen and check/correct.
- 8 They listen and whisper at the same time
- 9 Learners rehearse
- 6 Learners work in pairs. A reads out the dialogue. S/he then evaluates her/his own performance. Learner B gives feedback. Discrepancies may involve sounds, connected speech sequences, word stress, rhythm, pausing, speed, intonation, etc.
 - 1 Then Learner B has a go.
 - 2 Circulate and help the learners to work on the more important and most improvable of these features (these will vary amongst individual learners).

I've found that this type of activity boosts the performance and confidence of 'shy' speakers and weak listeners – especially learners whose main English language learning backgrounds have tended to focus more on reading and writing at the expense of speaking and listening.

With higher-level learners you can revisit dialogues and monologues in your coursebooks. Ensure that the extract is not too long. News snippets seem to work well. Here's one I have used from *Inside Out Intermediate*, Unit 6

And here are the news headlines. Following severe droughts in Africa, the President of the USA has announced that he is going to send food and provisions to the people of Somalia, who have lost their homes and livelihood.

*And here are the NEWS HEADlines.
Following seVERE DROUGHTS in AFrica,
the PRESident of the USA
has aNNOUNCED that he is going to SEND
FOOD and proVISIONs
to the PEOPLE of SoMALia,
who have LOST
their HOMES and LIVELihood.*

2 Sensitising to shifting stress for emphasis

- A Sue caught the 9.30 ferry to Gozo
- B Right, Sue caught the 9.15 ferry to Gozo.
- A No! Sue caught the 9.30 ferry to Gozo!
- B I see. You caught the 9.30 ferry to Gozo!
- A No! Sue caught the 9.30 ferry to Gozo!
- B Got you! Sue missed the 9.30 ferry to Gozo
- A No! Sue caught the 9.30 ferry to Gozo!
- B Right. Sue caught the 9.30 ferry to Sicily.
- A No! Sue caught the 9.30 ferry to Gozo!
- B OK! Sue caught the 9.30 plane to Gozo!
- A No! Sue caught the 9.30 ferry to Gozo!
- B Well, you really shouldn't mumble so much. Articulate!

References:

- Jenkins, J. *The Phonology of English as an International Language* OUP 2000
- Kelly, G. *How to Teach Pronunciation* Longman Pearson 2000
- Marks, J. and Bowen, T. *The Book of Pronunciation*, Delta, 2012
- Walker, R. *Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca* OUP 2010.

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I'd be delighted to hear any feedback from you if you use any of these suggestions.

Cheers! Alan alanmarshinmalta@gmail.com

POEM B Cake by Roger McGough

i wanted one life / you wanted another / we couldn't have our cake / so we ate each other.

COMPUTER GENDER

A language instructor was explaining to her class that in French, **nouns**, unlike their English counterparts, are grammatically designated as **masculine** or **feminine**.

One puzzled student asked, "What gender's **computer**?" The teacher did not know, and the word wasn't in her French dictionary. So for fun she split the class into two groups, appropriately enough, by **gender**, and asked them to decide whether "**computer**" should be a **masculine** or **feminine** noun.

Both groups were required to give **four reasons** for their **recommendation**.

The **men's** group decided that computers should definitely be of the **feminine** gender because:

1. **No one** but their **creator** understands their **internal logic**.
2. The **native language** they use to **communicate** with other computers is **incomprehensible** to every **one else**.
3. **Even the smallest mistakes** are stored in **long-term memory** for possible **later retrieval**.
4. As **soon** as you make a **commitment** to one, you find yourself spending **half your pay check** on **accessories** for it.

The **women's group**, however, concluded that computers should be **masculine**, because

1. In order to **get their attention** you have to **turn them on**.
2. They have **a lot of data** but they are still **clueless**.
3. They are **supposed to help** you **solve problems**, but **half** of the time **they** are the problem.
4. As **soon** as you **commit to one**, you realize that if you'd **waited** a little **longer**, you could have got a **better model**.