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TEACHING TIP

VIDEO VOICEOVERS FOR HELPFUL, ENJOYABLE PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE

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In a technology-based, entertaining way, video voiceovers combine the advantages of rehearsed pronunciation practice and tracking. This Teaching Tip report explains the pedagogical theory and procedures associated with video voiceovers, as well as the benefits that video voiceovers have produced in the author's ESL pronunciation class. Video examples of students preparing and presenting their video voiceovers (some of which were shown in the actual conference presentation) are accessible via YouTube links listed in appendices to this report.

INTRODUCTION

Rehearsed speaking activities, such as memorized speeches, provide useful pronunciation practice that can focus English learners' attention on accuracy and fluency (Morley, 1991). Research has shown the benefits of systematic, controlled imitation and repetition for improving learners' accuracy, fluency, and complexity in L2 speaking skills. Initially, in the short term, imitation activates vocabulary and syntactic structures. In the long term, repetition leads to the proceduralization of speaking skills (Davy, 2013; de Jong and Perfetti, 2011; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Segalowitz & Segalowitz, 1993). Nevertheless, rehearsed, repetitive activities can also be boring for students—during both the practice and presentation stages. This boredom reduces student motivation and enjoyment.

Tracking is an activity in which English language learners listen to and analyze an audio or video model of speech and then imitate and reproduce it, speaking the same words simultaneously with the model. Tracking and similar procedures¹² have been recommended (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996, p. 310; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Griner, 2010, p. 342; Hardison & Sonchaeng, 2005; Monk, Lindgren, & Meyers, 2004; Rosse, 1999) as useful for building English language learners' fluency and increasing their awareness of prosodic features, such as pitch range, intonation, rhythm, and pausing.

Video voiceovers for L2 pronunciation practice, as described and explained in the remainder of this report, combine the advantages of tracking with those of rehearsed, repetitive activities in a fun, entertaining way that increases learners' enjoyment and motivation in pronunciation classes.

¹² Similar to tracking are procedures called mirroring and shadowing. Mirroring “involves repeating simultaneously with a speaker (in person or on television) while imitating all the speakers' gestures, eye movements, and body posturing.” Shadowing, also called *echoing*, is like tracking except that learners repeat “slightly *after* rather than *along with* the speakers” (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996, p. 310).

PROCEDURE

The typical video voiceover procedure, which takes three or four one-hour class periods, involves five steps:

1. The teacher explains the assignment and shows models of video voiceovers (see Figure 1). Appendix A contains links to a number of video examples from my advanced ESL pronunciation class, recorded during the years that I have used video voiceovers.
2. In class or as homework, students go online, search for, and choose a short video clip from a movie, television program, commercial, YouTube®, etc. The clip must involve one or more characters speaking naturally, and it should show the characters' mouths moving as they speak. It may be funny or serious, but in either case the content should conform to local standards of propriety for classroom presentations.
3. Over several class sessions, as well as outside of class, students work on their video voiceovers, either individually or in small groups. They first create or download a written script and decide who will take what part(s). After students have chosen their video clip and speaking parts, they listen to the clip multiple times—tracking, and paying careful attention to both segmentals and suprasegmentals, as well as pausing and pacing. As students do this, the teacher circulates and offers assistance as needed. Appendix B has links to a number of video examples showing students involved in these activities.
4. After they learn their parts, and can speak/track along with the original at normal speed, with appropriate timing, students mute the audio but continue speaking aloud. They then work on synchronizing their speech with the video characters' actions, gestures, and mouth movements.
5. After sufficient rehearsal time—both in and out of class—students present their clips to the entire class, speaking aloud while the muted video image is projected. (See Appendix A for video examples.)



Figure 1. Students presenting a video voiceover in class (left) and projected screen image (right).

BENEFITS

While formal research has not yet been conducted on the benefits of video voiceovers for improving students' pronunciation, experience and end-of-semester course evaluations demonstrate that video voiceovers are among the students' favorite activities in my semester-long advanced ESL pronunciation course. Students like video voiceovers because they are motivating, entertaining, and beneficial. First of all, knowing that they will present their video voiceovers to a live audience increases presenters' motivation to prepare thoroughly so they can perform at their very best.

Class members watching other students' presentations find them very entertaining. That enlivens the pronunciation course. The facts (1) that the content they are presenting is not only authentic but also inherently entertaining and was selected by the students themselves and (2) that the projected image of the video provides attractive, professional quality visual support, also make student presentations interesting.

Students find that preparing and delivering their video voiceovers in this manner helps them improve their speaking accuracy and fluency in an enjoyable yet effective way. As they practice, they work on speaking rate, rhythm, pausing, and intonation, as well as segmentals. Initially, many students struggle to get all these elements right. They can't keep up with the video model, or they don't pause in the right places. Some words are difficult to pronounce, and students' intonation and rhythm don't always match the model's. However, after multiple repetitions along with the video model (tracking and imitating it), student improvement is frequently dramatic. When students can finally speak at the model rate, with correct prosody and articulation, and in synchronization with the video image, they are very pleased (and sometimes amazed) with their progress.

While I have not yet developed a specialized rubric for evaluating students' video voiceover presentations,¹³ my co-teachers and I give students personalized feedback (compliments and

¹³ ESL 302 Advanced English Pronunciation for International Students is a pass/fail class, so most assignments are

suggestions) after their performances. One semester, we added an extra, fun dimension to this evaluation; my teaching assistant organized an “Academy Awards” activity. After all the students presented their video voiceovers, class members voted on which voiceovers were best in various categories: Funniest, Best Prepared, Most Dramatic Voice, Closest Voice to Original, Best Timing, Presentation of Multiple Personalities by a Single Speaker, etc. (We created many categories so that most, if not all, students would get an award.) After the votes were tabulated, we held an awards ceremony and presented the winners with certificates and plastic “Oscar” statues from the local dollar store. To make this awards ceremony even more fun, we dressed up in formal clothing, rolled out a fake “red carpet,” and served sparkling apple juice in plastic goblets (see Figure 2). Appendix C has links to videos taken during this awards ceremony.



Figure 2. “Academy Awards” presentation for best video voiceovers in various categories.

LIMITATIONS

To do video voiceovers successfully, students need to be at least at an intermediate level of speaking proficiency. They also need to have access to the necessary technology (e.g., computers/tablets and Internet access). The classroom also needs to have the technological hardware needed to show the video clips on a large screen while students speak their voiceovers.

Finally, it should be noted that video voiceovers are just one of a variety of practice activities that should be used in a good ESL pronunciation course. Overusing any single activity (no matter

graded only as “done” or not.

how fun it is) can diminish student interest and motivation instead of increasing them.

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APPENDIX A

Video voiceover class presentations

These YouTube® video clips show a number of different final video voiceover presentations in my advanced ESL pronunciation course.

Two students present a segment from the movie *Tangled*. <http://youtu.be/xOMPv-n2S9s>

Several students present a segment from the movie *Toy Story*. http://youtu.be/eegT_TizcQs

Several students present a segment from the movie *Home Alone*. <http://youtu.be/MX5P-URdKVo>

A student presents a segment from a **Progressive Insurance** commercial. <http://youtu.be/qfaUNddjcr0>

A student presents a segment from the movie *The Princess Diaries*. http://youtu.be/_P3QX8ACQXk

Several students present a segment from the movie *The Longest Yard*. The portion where one character laments, “You broked-ed my nose,” is especially good. <http://youtu.be/AuLxAVmHLXo>

Several students present a segment from an episode of the television show *Friends*, in which characters taste some **English trifle** (which apparently isn't very good) prepared by another character. <http://youtu.be/XbjuQzaOBgQ>

Two students present a segment from the movie *The Lion King*. <http://youtu.be/GGae3rnKLMg>

Two students present a segment from the movie *Kung Fu Panda*. <http://youtu.be/rn2ygcZ5e74>

Three students present a segment from the movie *Mulan*. <http://youtu.be/vxqzjZbXRZk>

Four students present a segment from a BYUTV *Studio C* comedy skit, titled “Candyland” <http://youtu.be/KbIpHuRty5U>

APPENDIX B

Sample videos of students engaged in voiceover preparation and practice during class

Two students **choose the video clip** (from *The Lion King*) that they will later present to the class. http://youtu.be/KbNuzu2N_RA

Two students explain **how they came up with the script** for their video clip (from *The Lion King*). http://youtu.be/d3weEAD_hl4

Two students explain **how they found and downloaded the script** for their video clip (from *Mulan*). <http://youtu.be/SnCRrCqgW1o>

Two students **practice with their script and video clip** (from *The Lion King*).
<http://youtu.be/eYTifdpioes>

Two students **track (speak simultaneously) with their video clip** (from *Mulan*).
<http://youtu.be/FYwcuMuNjss>

Several groups in my advanced ESL pronunciation class **practice their video voiceover presentations in small groups** before presenting them to the entire class.
<http://youtu.be/tKT1NtlkvxY>

Several groups in my advanced ESL pronunciation class (another semester) **practice their video voiceover presentations in small groups** before presenting them to the entire class.
<http://youtu.be/wJOAOY8jlnk> ng

APPENDIX C Video voiceover class awards ceremony

The first part of our end-of-semester "**Academy Awards**" ceremony in my advanced ESL pronunciation course. <http://youtu.be/arBBQofvibc>

The second part of our end-of-semester "**Academy Awards**" ceremony in my advanced ESL pronunciation course. <http://youtu.be/aPmjBAZwTks>