

The teacher's use of Directionality

There are times when teachers want to establish dialogue between themselves and the class. They want an *I* ----> *you* (plural) situation. Here it makes sense for the teacher to face the class and talk to the students frontally. The students hear the teacher's voice coming at them from straight ahead.

There are other times when a teacher wants to reduce the barriers between his / her *I* and the students' *I*. This may well be the case in a story-telling activity or in leading a guided fantasy where the aim is to help the students to access their own imaginations. In this case it makes sense to ask the students to shut their eyes while the teacher speaks in a gentle voice from the back of the class. This may involve reorganising the students into rows all facing one way, if your class normally sits in a horseshoe.

Hearing the teacher's voice coming from behind invites the students to have trust. This can reduce the emotional distance between them and the voice. If the teacher's relationship with the class is right for this purpose, the voice from behind can achieve a fusion between the teacher's *I* and the *I* of the student, similar to the fusional state normal between a mother and her small baby.

Why should such regressive fusion be useful in the language classroom? The reason is technical: students are maximally receptive to the target language when they are in a fusional state. They are wide open to the new music of the language, to new intonations and sounds; they regain much of the linguistic plasticity they had as babies.

Should you want to think more about teacher voice directionality and its trance-creation potential, have a look at *Teaching Myself*, (Dufeu, OUP 1994).

The teacher's use of Volume

Some teachers speak louder to get the class's attention. Since this is a fairly generalised practice students do not respond. If the teacher lowers the volume and the students have to lean forward to hear, they will be shocked into attention.

Have you ever visited a class in which a teacher is giving a 'whisper dictation'? Even the fidgety students are still and they are all sitting forward to try to catch those sounds which are harder to hear in a voiceless speech flow.

The Teacher's Voice

For people like us who teach language, voice is a constant feature of our work and to find out more about it is simple, thrilling and of great practical value to our teaching. Here I first consider some aspects of voice that will raise your consciousness of the issues and then I move on to the use of these aspects of voice in the classroom.

Some aspects of voice

Directionality

Sound will reach your ears from a certain direction and from a certain distance. If you lose hearing in one ear you also lose the ability to know where a sound is coming from - a teacher with this condition will often look the wrong way when a student volunteers something in class.

Imagine the voice of someone you know coming from a point behind you and a couple of meters away. Now imagine the same voice coming from in front of you, to the right and from somewhere above. The effect of that same voice is different because of its perceived distance from you and the direction it is coming from.

Volume

If you are talking to a person you know well in a familiar setting you are unlikely to notice the volume at which they speak. Imagine this same person talking with much less volume, which probably makes you lean forward to catch what they are saying. Now imagine them talking more loudly and notice what effect this has on your perception of them.

Pitch

Bring to mind a voice you know well. Does this person use the whole of their voice range - do they sometimes speak very high and sometimes very low? I can think of people who tend to stay on a high monotonous pitch, near the top of their voice range, and I can think of others who breathe deep in their stomachs and speak in a deeper part of their voice with plenty of resonance.

Tempo

Did you ever meet a person from the American Deep South who speaks really slow?

There are others who habitually speak at Shinkansen speed.

Change of tempo has a major effect on the listener as the whole of his or her auditory processing has to change gear between dealing with a fast speaker and a slow one. People are particularly affected by change of tempo when listening to a foreign language.

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pls explain!

TGV

One of the interesting aspects of native speaking to a foreigner and teachers' voice behaviour in a beginners' class is that both will often slow down their speech to an unnatural pace. This speed distortion of the language is done with the best of intentions, but it does not always achieve the clarity it intends.

How much do you slow down in class? Are there times, maybe, when you should speed up?

A nice tempo exercise with a class is to read them the next passage from their text book at normal native pace, then much slower, then fast again. This can cause a cycle of incomprehension / depression (first reading) comprehension-dawning / lifting of depression (second reading) and 90% comprehension / elation with the third reading.

There is more about teacher voice-use in class in Michael Grinder's *Righting the Educational Conveyor Belt* (Metamorphous Press, 1991) which may help you to cope with areas like regulating student attention and discipline.

The purpose of this article is not to teach you a lot about voice, but to open a window for you onto this central and mostly undiscussed topic. With the window open you will make your own discoveries.

The mood of the class is quite different when the teacher gives them a shouted dictation. This arouses energy and counter-aggression. It brings blood to the students' cheeks.

In six years of learning Spanish and French in secondary school I never heard either language whispered. How much whispering have you heard on language-teaching tapes?

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The teacher's use of pitch.

Try this experiment: take a cassette recorder into the class with you and record yourself explaining grammar. Record both your grammar presentation and your response to students' grammar questions. As you listen to the recording, notice your pitch and decide on some way you could vary it experimentally. Do not aim to make your voice -use 'better'; only different.

Next time you explain grammar use a different pitch and notice what receptive changes this provokes in individual students.

Here I am using the frame offered by John Fanselow in *Breaking Rules* (Longman 1989) His basic message is: notice what you do habitually in class and then do it differently, just for fun.. Notice the effect on the students and on you!

Do you sometimes tell stories in your language classroom? By varying the pitch as you tell the story you can provoke different sensory reactions in your listeners. If you breathe from deep down, speak slowly and from the comfortable bottom of your voice range, you will help the listeners to access their world of sensation and feeling. If you breathe from a middle position in your torso and vary your voice tempo and your pitch, if you use pauses effectively, and if you dramatise a lot, you are helping your listeners to enter their auditory imaginations and hear many things.

Once you have voice-induced them into their auditory world and say 'The breeze moved the bushes gently' they are likely to hear the rustle of the leaves, rather than see the country scene or feel the breeze, the temperature and the humidity.

When you tell a story it makes sense to choose the right voice for each part of the narration: if you are describing a scene visually you affect the listeners more if you go up into the level, high-pitched picture-provoking voice. When you come to a patch of dialogue the auditory voice is the most effective. Try it, and see and feel the students' response.

t/o. bold
The Teacher's use of tempo.