

Sent to Lucia [REDACTED] Resource.

Voice

By Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims, UK.

May I ask you about yours? Could you zip through the questions below and give them clear mental answers as you read?

- In how many different manifestations do I know my own voice: in my head as I speak, echoing back from cliffs in the mountains, on my voice mailbox? How many more?
- Am I fast speaker or a slow speaker of my mother tongue?
- Am I faster or slower than other people in my family?
- When I speak to myself in my head do I hear fast speech or slow speech?
- Does my speed of speaking vary with the situation?
- When I speak my second language does my speed of speaking change?
- What are the differences between my voice in mother tongue and in the second language?
- Does my voice change on the phone? If so, how?
- Do I have "an early morning voice" and a "late night one" ?
- Do I like my voice shouting in the second language
whispering in the second language
singing in the second language?
- Am I more like my father or my mother in voice qualities?
- Which voice in my family do I prefer and why?

If you found answering these questions to be an interesting activity your students may find the same. The best way of offering them the text above is by dictating

it, as this gives time for them to think through their answers while engaged in the mechanical operation of writing.

Once they have done this preparatory work ask them to work in threes answering the questions.

WHERE IS VOICE IN LANGUAGE WORK?

It is truly marvellous that we language teachers, who deal with voice all day long, spend so little time thinking about it. And yet it with our voice that we mostly get across to our students and it with their voices that they reach the speakers of their target language. How often do teachers correct the breathing and pitch of their students in the target language? Has anyone ever helped male Turkish speakers of the Indo-European languages to get their volume down and stop booming? How about inaudible female speakers from places like Japan, when they speak our languages?

A marvellous exercise to help students become aware of volume control in L2 is the activity that follows:

THE ROMEO AND JULIET DICTATION

I was teaching in a first floor room and asked all the boys in the group to sit on the grass below the windows of the room. They took pen and paper with them.

I fixed five or six copies of a poem text to the wall of the classroom away from the windows.

I asked the girls (2/3rd of whom were whisperers and mumblers in English) to read the poem and then to go to the window and dictate it to one of the boys down below. Each reading + dictating girl partnered one of the writing boys. The girls could go from the wall to the window as often as they wanted.

The hubbub of several voices speaking together and the physical distance between the partners forced the girls to raise their voices to a reasonable level. This exercise gently helps the demure and the shy. (For more useful ideas in this area see Dictation, Davis and Rinvolucris, CUP, 1989.)

ORAL EXAM PREPARATION

When you are preparing students for an external oral exam teaching them skilful voice use can excitingly enhance their confidence. This happens because you are offering

them the chance to control what goes on in the oral rather than to feel entirely dominated by the examiner.

To prepare the students for the oral ask them to notice that some people speak fast and others slowly. Pair the students off and ask them to have a conversation in which they each try to notice and speak at the same tempo as the other.

Ask the students to repeat the same exercise with new partners, so that they encounter the difficulties of getting in voice harmony with different speakers.

Suggest to the students that an excellent way of having good contact with the examiner is to try and speak at a speed reasonably near hers. It is good to put this in the context of the examiner's relative isolation and fatigue. Some candidates do not realise how tiring it is to smile at the 19th jittery candidate of the day.

(You could suggest that candidates also mirror examiner pitch and phrasing, but usually to follow tempo is enough for this particular situation. It is amazing that professional examiners, like the Cambridge ones, have usually received scant training in voice skills)

VOICE IN THE COURSEBOOK

Some of the readers of Resource are people concerned with the preparation and production of coursebooks and this is yet another area of language teaching where voice resource is not being efficiently worked on.

How many coursebooks do you know that offer a wide range of voices for the students to learn the target language from? In an extended family you get voices below one, toddler voices, latency period voices, the voices of puberty and so on right up to the voices of the very old. The normal age range among coursebook audio tape actors is 25-50, which means that the target language is being very thinly presented , from a voice angle.

The field of voice use in coursebooks is virtually unexplored and yet there are so many exciting things that could be done, feasibly and reasonably cheaply. Rather than complain let me suggest a few audio-tape exercises:

1. Ask the students to listen to the same passage read by the same person in three different voices:
 - a) a fairly high-pitched voice, produced with shoulders back and fairly shallow breathing. This voice is best produced standing.

b) a deep, low voice, produced in a slumped seated position, and produced from the belly with deep breathing.

c) a middle range voice, with plenty of change of pace and pausing for dramatic effect.

The students are given the specific task of deciding which voice they like best and why. (As they focus on this task they will have three chances to understand what the passage is about).

2. Offer the students a tape with three different people reading the same passage. The students choose the voice they like best and attempt to say why.

3. Record a dialogue twice with the same actors. In the first recording they read their parts as if the other person was not there- they actively avoid getting into rapport.

In the second recording they go for as much voice rapport as possible.

Ask the students to listen to both recordings and to decide what the differences between them are.

4. Ask the students to listen to a short conversation between two people on tape. Ask them to listen again and decide which of the two voices they prefer. Ask them to listen a third time and to pick out and write down one line of what their favourite speaker says. Finally, explain that voice and hand-writing are both emanations of who a person is- ask them to write the line chosen in what they guess to be the hand-writing of that speaker.

Finally show them the dialogue written in the two hand-writings of the two actors.

5. Have the same simple passage read by four children, two male and two female of ages ranging from 6 to 12.

Ask the students to decide on the age of each reader after listening to the four readings twice.

Do the same with readers in their 70's and 80's.

6. Tape an open conversation in which 3 close members of the same family take part , plus a fourth person who does not belong to their genetic grouping. It is up to the students to spot the odd voice out. (this idea is one of many I learnt from the late Saxon Menne)

You don't have to be a genius to a) see the point of the above ideas or b) to come up with another dozen voice-focused activities yourself. All it takes is an interest in and awareness of the medium through which language primarily happens: the human voice.

There must be 200 very decent teachers Resource books on the market for teachers of French, German, Italian and English and not one of them is principally about voice. It was, therefore, with some excitement that I recently heard that Alan Maley is currently preparing just such a book.

Keep your eyes skinned next year for a book by Maley on VOICE.

Why have we in the Pilgrims-Longman list never thought of commissioning such a book?