Pronunciation Detective: Stress

Audience: College, or adult learners
Topic: Directions and word or sentence stress
Level: Beg-low to Adv-low
Technology: Voice recorder or voice recording app; Spectrographic playback program (e.g., Praat); Speakers; Computer or Phone, Projector or HDMI Flat Screen TV
Rationale: Technology allows learners to study stress in a replayable sample of speech. Students complete an authentic task of asking for directions from a speaker of the target language. While envisioned for English, this activity can focus on any target language variety, and can be adjusted to different scales - from syllables to sequences. While accessibility is often a weakness of MALL applications, recording apps are simple and come preinstalled on most phones. In order to gain learner buy-in, this activity may be preceded by a demonstration of how intonation can influence comprehensibility.
**Objectives:**

- Students will ask for directions from an English speaker
- Students will analyze speech for stress - patterns of intonation that are higher (prominence), longer (duration), and often louder (dynamics)
- Students will notice word stress (beginner); sentence stress (intermediate); or stress in connected discourse (advanced)
- Students will compare their own speech to target speech with the aid of audio and visual feedback, and will attempt to match the target

6 Ecosystems of MALL

Linguistic Taught language	**Prosody** - learners focus on **stress** in speech (prominence, duration, and dynamics)
Acquisitional Facilitated aspects of acquisition	Features **enhanced** audio input with visuals in Praat; Shows learners the **gap** between production and target language; **Deepens** encounters with language through analysis
Pedagogical Involved teacher/classroom management moves	Promoting **Autonomy**; Collecting **outside language** samples; **Creating** transcripts; Providing instantaneous visual **feedback**
Technological Required technological capacities and skills	**Microphone**; **Speakers**; **Spectrographic playback** program; **Operating system; HDMI***
Institutional Necessary buy-in from different stakeholders	Institutional, Regional, and National **Student Learning Outcome**s; Learner **buy-in**
Sociocultural Beliefs, attitudes, predispositions that affect activity implementation	**Varieties** of English; **Target** variety; **Appropriacy** of recording speech; **Censorship** of inappropriate responses; **Discrimination** among learners

Activity Procedures:

1. Students ask directions from an English speaker and record the answer. Learners may prefer to speak to an information kiosk attendant or other professional informant rather than the public. Make sure learners understand how to ask for directions, and how to get permission to record.

2. Students email samples or send them by SMS to the teacher before class.

3. Transcribe selected samples and print transcriptions out for students to mark.

4. Load the samples into a spectrographic playback program such as Praat and pass out scripts in class. A projector or flat screen displays the application from a phone or computer desktop.

5. Play the samples aloud. Students hear, see, and notice stress in several sample sentences and mark the scripts accordingly. Advanced students can transcribe samples themselves.
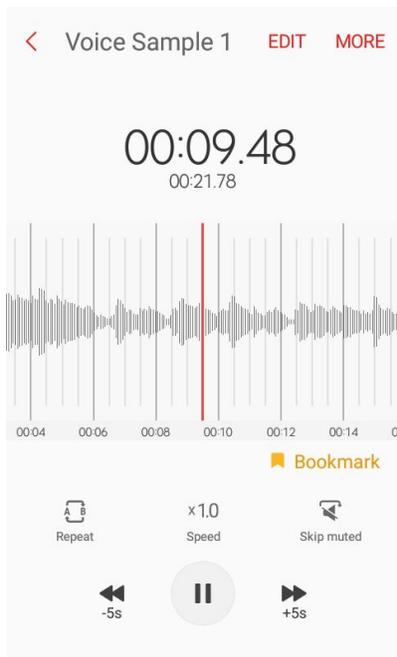
(Samsung Voice Recorder app)

Unmarked

Sample 1: Yeah, if you just go two blocks that way, make a right on Watson street, uh, follow it to the end of the road and then make a left onto Smith street, the post office will be just ahead on your right.

Marked

Sample 1: Yeah, if you just go two blocks that way, make a right on Watson street, uh, follow it to the end of the road and then make a left onto Smith street, the post office will be just ahead on your right.

6. Students compare their results with peers and the class comes to a consensus on the patterns of stress and intonation in the samples.

7. Students listen to the samples on their own devices several times as they record their speech, and try to match their output to the target speech with the aid of the spectrogram.

Further Reading

Kukulska-Hulme, A. (2013). Re-skilling language learners for a mobile world. Monterey, CA: The International Research Foundation for English Language Education. Retrieved from http://www.tirfonline.org/english-in-the-workforce/mobile-assisted-language-learning/