

# Cool Speech

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Firsty Work, 2012

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As technology advances, the sophistication of mobile apps that can be used in classroom speaking and pronunciation lessons increases. As teachers become more aware of the benefits of mobile learning, the range of classroom resources available to them is greatly enhanced, as are opportunities to develop learner autonomy. Some of these new apps enable us to more easily use samples of potentially difficult-to-find



authentic speech in our classrooms and, if we are lucky, incorporate structured activities.

One mobile app, based on spontaneous speech and aimed at providing intermediate to upper-intermediate learners with authentic listening and pronunciation practice, won the 2013 British Council's ELTons Digital Innovation award. The Cool Speech app

is based on recorded interviews with ordinary people. Their speech is not adapted for the language learner and while using this app in class or for self-access, students are exposed to the use of non-lexical fillers, repetition, mumbling and other interjections which they encounter in many of their out-of-the-classroom situations. Textbooks tend to avoid such aspects of spoken language whereas with this app, our students were exposed to more features of real speech. This added several dimensions to our lessons, particularly at an intermediate level.

The Cool Speech app has the flexibility to cover areas such as intensive listening, contrast and comparison of varying levels of speech rate, dictation exercises based

on rapid, natural spontaneous speech, and features of pronunciation such as sounds, word stress and connected speech. It provides 48 listening activities based on the speech of eight native speakers who have a wide range of British English accents.

For teacher support, there is a Cool Speech website (<http://www.speechinaction.org/cool-speechhot-listening-fluent-pronunciation/>) that provides a comprehensive usage guide; free downloadable worksheets, answer keys and a self-access worksheet for the first speaker sample; and a teacher training video on how to use the app effectively as a pronunciation tool and as an intensive listening resource in the classroom. For the less tech-savvy teacher these instructional tools make the app very easy to navigate and comfortable to use in the classroom. It is a great relief to have good clear instructions about what equipment is needed to project your iPad onto a screen with a data projector, and how to set it all up, which can be the tech novice's worst nightmare.

After trialling this application in a few of our classes, ranging from intermediate B1 to upper-intermediate B2 level, we found the feature that most appealed to our students was its access to proficient English speakers. Students have the opportunity to listen to short segments of speech from an ordinary person being interviewed about a topic, such as 'Aspects of work'.

Another popular feature with our students was the speech rate activity where they are exposed to spontaneous speech samples with varying speech rates of 200 words per minute, 180 words per minute or 150 words per minute. Students listen to samples at different speech rates and vote whether they are 'faster' or 'slower' paced than the original sample. This activity can be extended further by using the function which enables students to record their own speech rate and compare it with a native speaker's sample. This can be a good benchmark for many students on how fast the average person speaks, and can provide formative feedback on how they can work on their own speech rates to develop their speaking fluency.

We particularly liked the app's unique ability to incorporate a number of skills into one whole lesson. For example, in the listening 'hotspot' section, students read and listen. In the dictation exercises, the students need to read, listen and type, and finally in the pronunciation section students need to listen and speak. We also found that if you are using the option of projecting onto a large screen, the free downloadable worksheets from the website can help make the lessons more interactive, especially if used as pairwork activities.

Apart from being designed only for the iPad 2 or higher (it is not available on the Android operating system or other devices), the only limitation of the Cool Speech app is that it only uses British accents. In future versions, it would be good to see other

Englishes featured. However, overall, the Cool Speech app is a must for spicing up pronunciation courses. It can currently be downloaded for AU\$8.95 in the Apple store.

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