

PROPOSAL

Listen Up

Questions and Answers

Intensive listening for intermediate students.

Tablet Application

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Email Address: richardcauldwell@me.com

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1.0 SUMMARY

This is a proposal for a **tablet application** for use by **intermediate students** primarily in **self study**. It consists of twenty four units in twelve question-and-answer pairs. The purpose is to help prepare learners for their encounters with normal fast everyday speech by teaching them to be comfortable with speech at different speeds up to 400 words per minute. Using the multi-touch capacity of tablets (sweep, single, double touch, etc), users will be in touch with recordings of fast, slow, and citation form pronunciations of words. Interactive exercises will accustom them to the different soundshapes that words have in natural speech.

2.0 SOUNDSHAPES - DEFINITION

The best known example of a soundshape is the citation form of a word - the clearly spoken pronunciation that is given in both symbols and in soundfiles in a pronunciation dictionary. The citation form is thus the canonical soundshape of a word. But all words (not just the so-called weak forms and frequent forms) have a variety of soundshapes which are usually faster and shorter variants of the citation form. In the stream of speech, the canonical soundshape does not occur: vowels, consonants, syllables, and stresses are altered or omitted. Their precise soundshape will often defy description, and will vary according to the properties of rhythm and speed of the neighbouring words.

3.0 RATIONALE

Listening materials and methodology do not prepare learners adequately for their encounters with normal everyday speech. What should be at the centre of work on listening - the study of, and learning about, the stream of speech - is supplanted by work on compensatory strategies which take centre stage. These strategies are useful (they have general educational/general communicative value) but (a) they are not specific to the task of decoding speech and (b) they dominate the time in the listening classroom - they crowd out the work on perception. Typically, listening classes focus on what can be done before and after listening (predicting, guessing from context) and they neglect both the process of perception that happens privately inside the learner, and teaching the forms and patterns - the facts - of the stream of speech.

Current listening teaching places too much reliance on the hope that 'listening to lots' will eventually allow listening competence to emerge. It is a lengthy process, and it is not teaching.

Listen Up aims to improve on osmosis by 'teaching the facts' of the stream of speech. What are these facts? Facts which would help language learners such as Ying, who wrote in her learner-diary

I believe I need to learn what the word sounds like when it is used in the sentence. Because sometimes when a familiar word is used in a sentence, I couldn't catch it. Maybe it changes somewhere when it is used in a sentence (Goh 1997, p. 366)

Ying's dilemma is that she believes she knows a word, but there is something about its position in a sentence that results in her not being able to 'catch' it. Her thinking is that it 'changes somewhere when it is used in a sentence'. Ying is right - but most native speakers and teachers are deaf to these changes.

The facts are as follows:

- [1] for the listener, words are transient - they take on a very short-lived existence as sound and then are immediately gone. They do not hang around to be inspected.
- [2] In this brief existence words have a wide variety of soundshapes which often have only a fragmentary resemblance to their full forms, their citation forms.
- [3] This variety of soundshapes is caused by the different rhythmic patterns and different speeds of everyday speech.
- [4] These patterns are created by speakers, moment by moment. They are not inherent in the vocabulary or grammar of English.
- [4] There are a limited number of these patterns, and they - and their effects on words - are teachable.

Native speakers, and expert speakers of all kinds, (teachers/ELT authors/Lecturers) have a special kind of deafness in relation to these facts: we are unaware that the word fragments which arrive at our ears are not fully formed, we believe that we have heard full words. What arrives may be 'annatwuzzat' or 'weatherwer' and we report hearing full forms of the word sequences 'And that was that' and 'Where there were'.

Words have a wide variety of soundshapes, and it is the purpose of **Listen Up** to help learners such as Ying in perceiving them.

The technology for remedying this situation has been arriving for some decades - but has yet to be put to use. **Listen Up** aims to

put into the hands of learners and teachers direct encounters with speech of different speeds so that they can learn the sooner to be competent listeners to English.

4.0 Full Working Title

Listen Up - Questions and Answers. Intensive listening for Intermediate Students.

5.0 Proposer

Dr. Richard Cauldwell, Proprietor of speechinaction.com.

Email Address: rtc@blueyonder.co.uk

Postal Address: 10 Victoria Road, Harborne, Birmingham, B17 0AH.

Telephone: 07790 629 859

6.0 Purpose (cf. Rationale above)

Listen Up helps learners get a grip on fast speech. It teaches them the effects that speaking at different speeds, and speaking with different stress patterns, have on the soundshapes of words. It provides ear-training so that learners get accustomed to recognising immediately the words that are familiar to them in their reading and writing.

6.1 Description.

Listen Up is designed to mesh with intermediate level main course textbooks. It has 24 units, in 12 pairs. Each pair focuses on a topic: the first unit in each pair focuses on speed and rhythm effects on **questions**, the other of which focuses on speed and rhythm effects on **answers**.

Each unit has 5 sections.

1. Mini listening	Three questions which focus attention on sentences which will be the subject of later work. Text of ca 120 words, between 30 seconds and 60 seconds long.
2. Dictation	Users type words that they hear: the focus is

	on words that are 'known' but are going unfamiliarly fast
3. Speed work	Users get a feel for sentences spoken at different speeds
4. Rhythm work	Users get a feel for sentences spoken with different rhythmic patterns
5. Soundshapes	Users learn about the different soundshapes that words have.

6.2 Compatible with Textbooks

Listen Up Intermediate is compatible with main course textbooks at intermediate level - New Headway Intermediate, Face2Face, New Cutting Edge, New Inside Out.

6.3 Relationship to CEFR

Target level Common European Framework for Languages B1/B2

6.4 Exponents

Each chapter will feature a focus on grammatical exponents relating to topics and grammar appropriate to Intermediate level.

6.5 Different speeds

Listen Up trains people to hear and understand words spoken at average speed, and at fast speeds. [Slow = 120 words per minute; Average = 240 wpm; Fast = 320 wpm and Super fast = 400wpm]

6.6 Designed for self-study and the classroom

Listen Up is designed for use in self-study, but it can also be used in the classroom with the use of downloadable handouts.

6.7 Research based

Listen Up is based on decades of research into spontaneous speech, and of over a decade of electronic publishing using recordings of unscripted speech (cf. www.speechinaction.net)

6.9 Expandable

The design is flexible: it can be adapted to produce materials at beginner and advanced levels. It can be added to at Intermediate level by looking at other areas as well as the questions and answers of this proposal.

7.0 Countries/user groups that Listen Up will sell to

All countries which use British English main course textbooks at intermediate level, and which have a population that uses Tablet devices.

8.0 Main competition

There is no competition that I know of.

9.0 Biographical details of proposer

Richard Cauldwell www.speechinaction.net

Richard Cauldwell has taught English since 1979. He has taught in France, Hong Kong, Japan, and the UK, where he spent eleven years at the University of Birmingham's English for International Students' Unit. In 2001 he set up **speechinaction**, which publishes electronic books specialising in the use of recordings of spontaneous speech to teach listening and pronunciation. His first publication *Streaming Speech: Listening and Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English* [British/Irish version] won a British Council Innovations in English Language Teaching award (ELTON) in 2004.