

Techniques for Teaching Students Language Prosody

Duke Language Symposium
February 28, 2020

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Overview

- I. Definition and importance of prosody
- II. Placement of pauses
- III. Pitch change and focus
- IV. Online Resources in a variety of languages

I. The importance of prosody

Prosody includes using volume, tempo, rhythm and pitch changes to convey the structure and meaning of a speaker's message

English speakers' use of prosody can include:

- Showing emphasis, contrast, and semantic focus
- Conveying emotional states such as excitement, happiness, empathy and irritation
- Signaling that they are voicing a statement, a question, or command

(Murphy, 2017, p. 31-32)

II. Pauses and thought groups

We use pauses to break long utterances into shorter chunks (thought groups) to make them easier to understand.

(Grant, 2014, p. 17)

A thought group

- Has pauses before and after
- Has a grammatical structure
- Has meaning

Activity: Listening for Thought Groups

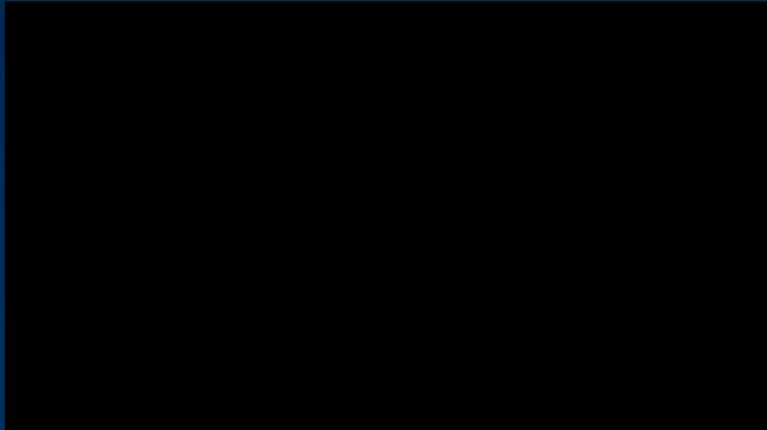
You will hear an excerpt from a speech by Nikki Haley, ambassador to the United Nations, given March 7, 2018 at Duke.

Draw a slash between thought groups whenever you hear a pause.

“But the biggest difference, by far, between governor and being ambassador is the nature of the opposition.”

Listening for Thought Groups

But the biggest difference, by far, between governor and being ambassador is the nature of the opposition.



II. Pitch Change and Focus

Focus is the use of pitch contours and vowel lengthening to highlight important information for listeners (Jones, 2016, p. xv).

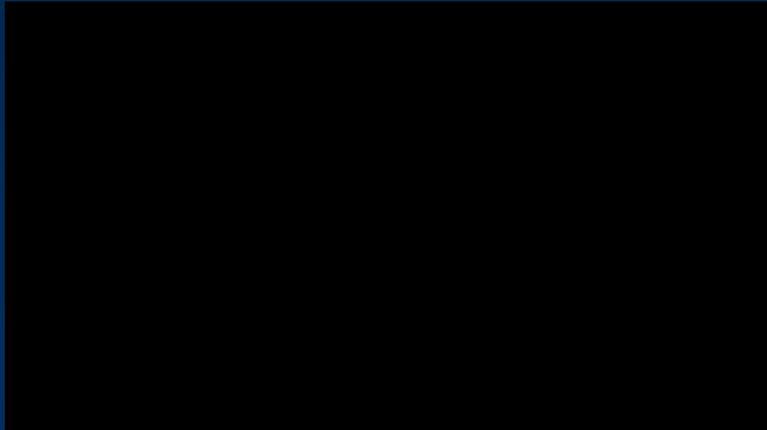
- Shows emphasis
- Signals new information in a sentence
- Highlights contrasts

Focus words

- Each thought group will usually have at least one focus word
- Focus words sound different by:
 - Lengthening of the stressed vowel
 - Pitch change within focus word
 - Volume

Listening for Focus

But the biggest difference, by far, between governor and being ambassador is the nature of the opposition.



Focus Words

But the biggest difference, / by far, /between governor and being ambassador/ is the nature of the opposition.

Listening for thought groups and focus

You know people sometimes ask me the biggest difference between being Governor of South Carolina and being the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Well, there's the little stuff. The pace is different-- New York is a city that truly never sleeps. The people are different. Everyone talks very fast, even faster than me. And the weather is way worse. But the biggest difference, by far, between governor and being ambassador, is the nature of the opposition.

Another example: a dialog

A: Hey, what's up?

B: Not much. Studying.

A: Studying what? Statistics?

B: No, Biology. What are you studying?

A: Economics. I have a midterm tomorrow.

B: Oh, good luck!

Tools to help feel or visualize English prosody

- Rubber Band
- Chinese yo-yo
- Stress ball
- Hand or body movement
- Kazoo

Focus Words

But the biggest difference, / by far, /between governor and being ambassador/ is the nature of the opposition.

Another example: a dialog

A: Hey, what's up?

B: Not much. Studying.

A: Studying what? Statistics?

B: No, Biology. What are you studying?

A: Economics. I have a midterm tomorrow.

B: Oh, good luck!

IV. Online resources for teaching prosody in various languages

Youghlish: <https://youghlish.com/> (available in ten languages)

TED Talks in various languages (Including French, Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese and Turkish)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TEDxTalks>

Resource: [Youglish.com](https://youglish.com)

youglish.com/pronounce/C%27est%20a%20dire/french?

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How to pronounce **C'est a dire** in French (4 out of 32641):

Laissez vos données de santé sauver votre vie | Paul-Louis Belletante | TEDxIssyles... Watch later Share



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Speed: normal

c'est-à-dire nos utilisateurs qui
malheureusement ont déclaré

TED.com

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TED.com

Chinese: Liu Bolin: [The Invisible Man](#)

The screenshot shows a video player interface for a TED talk. At the top left, the TED logo is followed by the tagline "Ideas worth spreading". In the top right corner, there are two tabs: "WATCH" and "DISCOVER". The video title "Liu Bolin | TED2013" and "The invisible man" is displayed on the left side of the video frame. The video itself shows two men on a stage; one is wearing a colorful, patterned jacket, and the other is in a dark suit. A large screen in the background displays a grid of numbers. The text "RECORDED AT TED" is overlaid at the bottom of the video. On the right side of the video frame, there is a vertical menu with icons for "Share", "Add to list", "Like", and "Recommend". At the bottom of the video frame, there is a progress bar with a play/pause button, a volume icon, a chat icon, a settings icon, and a full-screen icon. The time "7:15" is also visible.

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References

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Jones, Tamara, editor. *Pronunciation in the Classroom: the Overlooked Essential*. TESOL Press, 2016.

Murphy, John. *Teaching the Pronunciation of English: Focus on Whole Courses*. University of Michigan Press, 2017.