Assessing Intelligibility

Teaching Notes

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Using this kit

This professional development kit, comprising a DVD and teacher support material, is designed to help teacher trainers focus on the judgements they make about pronunciation when assessing the spoken learning outcomes in the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP).

The DVD

The DVD runs for approximately an hour but has been designed so that you can stop at various points to discuss issues and complete a range of activities. The activities last for approximately 30 minutes.

The DVD has five parts:

- **Part 1**: Defining intelligibility
- **Part 2**: Developing a shared understanding of intelligibility
- **Part 3**: Supporting teachers to make assessments of intelligibility - includes Assessment tool
- **Part 4**: Task design: The impact of task design on the assessment of intelligibility
- **Part 5**: Learner performances for other activities

Each part will take more than one session to complete. The DVD can be stopped to allow discussion and completion of activities that relate to the samples presented in the DVD.

**Parts 1 – 3** should be done in the same session and will take approximately one and half to two hours to complete. The samples used as the basis for these activities are mainly from CSWE I learners. You can try some activities with the samples from other levels using the samples in part 5.

**Part 4**, on task design and assessment, will take approximately an hour to complete.

In **Part 5**, samples at CSWE II and III levels are provided. You can use these for group activities, or with classes, in a number of different ways.
Trainer support material

The DVD is accompanied by support material for the teacher running the session including:

1. Session activity sheets for use with all parts of the DVD.
2. Assessment tool for use with Parts 3 and 4 of the DVD.
3. Task cards (for activity 6).

Session activity sheets, assessment tool, task cards and information sheets can be photocopied as handouts for teachers.
Trainer support material

1 Preparing your session

For each participant photocopy the session sheet that relates to the section of the DVD you wish to present.

You will also need for each participant:

- One copy of the assessment tool for Part 3
- Four copies of the assessment tool for Part 4
- One copy of the Spoken Learning Outcomes E L01, D L02, and A L03 for Certificate II and E L02 and D L02 for Certificate III
- Up to 6 copies of the assessment tool for Part 5.
Part 1: Defining intelligibility

2 Session activity sheets

Activity 1

Finish this sentence:

‘Pronounces key utterances intelligibly’ means...

....................................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................

Discussion points Activity 1

• What similarities and differences were there in the way you finished your sentences?

• What do we mean by intelligibility and key utterances? And how many of these key utterances have to be intelligible?

• Whose perspective do we take when we assess intelligibility? For example, that of a teacher? Or of an ‘average’ person in the community?

• Is there a scale of intelligibility for learners at different levels?
Part 2: Developing shared understandings of intelligibility

Activity 2

Listen to Speaker 1 as she describes a picture. Complete questions 1 to 4 below as instructed in the DVD.

1. Would you say that this speaker pronounces key utterances intelligibly?
   
   Yes / No (please circle)

   Why? Give reasons for your judgement.
   ....................................................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................................................

2. Estimate how much of his/her speech you understand. Put a cross on the scale below, ranging from 0% to 100%.

   0%    50%    100%

3. Estimate how hard you had to work to understand the speaker? Put a cross on the scale below, ranging from 0% to 100%.

   0%    50%    100%

   Why? Give reasons for your judgement.
   ....................................................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................................................
4. Listen to the same speaker again. There are four short pauses between each utterance to give you time to write down exactly what you think the speaker is saying.

(a)...............................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
(b)...............................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
(c)...............................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
(d)...............................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................................

Now listen to speakers 2 to 5 and decide whether you think they pronounce key utterances intelligibly or not. Do you think they have achieved the intelligibility criterion?

Speaker 2 pronounces key utterances intelligibly Yes / No
Speaker 3 pronounces key utterances intelligibly Yes / No
Speaker 4 pronounces key utterances intelligibly Yes / No
Speaker 5 pronounces key utterances intelligibly Yes / No

Discussion points for Activity 2

- Was there individual variation in your Yes/No assessments?
- Audio versus visual: what difference does this make? What is the role of context? How much support should there be from the context?
- How different were your assessments on measures 2 and 3 for Speaker 1?
- Whose perspective are we taking when we assess intelligibility?
Part 3: Supporting teachers to make assessments of intelligibility

Activity 3: Cert I, Module D LO2 ‘Can tell a short recount’ (DVD Sample 6)

The following assessment tool is designed to help teachers reflect upon:

- how much they understand
- how hard they have to work to understand a speaker
- what areas of pronunciation a learner needs to work on.

Watch DVD Sample 6 and use the assessment tool to assess this speaker.
3 Assessment tool

Use this tool to help you make judgements on learner intelligibility during a spoken assessment task.

1. Place a cross on the line to indicate how much you understood.

   Not enough                                         Enough to complete the task/ transaction
   
   If you put the cross in the shaded section then go to question 2.
   If you put the cross in the unshaded section, then the learner has not achieved the intelligibility criterion. You should go to question 3 to give more information about the learner’s pronunciation to help inform future teaching.

2. Place a cross on the line to indicate how hard you had to work to understand the speaker.

   too much                                             a lot                                             some                                             very little
   
   If the cross is in the shaded section the learner has achieved the intelligibility assessment criterion. If the cross is in the unshaded section then the learner has not achieved this assessment criterion. If you had to work ‘too much’ to understand the learner, you should go on to question 3.
3. Tick the appropriate boxes to indicate where the learner had problems with intelligibility.

Sounds □ eg.............................................................................
Stress patterns □ eg.............................................................................
Making key words prominent □ eg.............................................................................
Chunking (pause groups) □ eg.............................................................................
Intonation □ eg.............................................................................
Other □ eg.............................................................................

Discussion points for Activity 3

• Compare your answers with those of your colleagues. How were they the same/different? Why?

• Do you think the shaded areas in each scale are in the right proportions? For example, should we be prepared to work as hard as is suggested by this scale in order to assess someone as intelligible?

• To what extent was the final section on identifying pronunciation problems helpful for identifying future teaching priorities for this speaker?

• How could it be used to give feedback to the students/teachers?
Part 4: Task design:
The impact of task design on the assessment of intelligibility

Activity 4: Cert I, Module D LO1 ‘Can give a spoken description’
(Sample 7 – audio only)

In Sample 7 a Certificate I learner is being assessed on Module D LO1 (‘Can give a spoken description’). He has been asked to choose a photograph, which the assessor cannot see, and to describe it. Listen to Sample 7 and use the assessment tool for intelligibility to assess whether or not you think the learner is intelligible.

Discussion Points for Activity 4

• Did you all agree on which picture the learner was describing? (you will find details of the photo he was describing at the end of Part 4).
• Discuss whether or not you could see the pictures and did it make a difference?
• If you were trying to set up a similar task, what kinds of pictures would you use? Why?
• What impact did the fact you could not see the speaker have?

Activity 5: Cert II, Module A LO3 ‘Can negotiate a spoken transaction for goods and services’ (Sample 8 – audio and visual)

Listen to the sample again and make another assessment, using a fresh copy of the assessment tool.

Activity 6: Cert II, Module A LO3 ‘Can negotiate a spoken transaction for goods and services’ (Sample 8 – audio and visual)

The learner in this sample is being assessed for CSWE II, Module A LO3. He is making enquiries to a dealer about a second hand car.

Assess his performance using the assessment tool. You can only hear his part of the interaction.
Activity 6 (Continued)

For discussion

- Compare your assessments with those of your colleagues. How are they the same/different?
- What is the impact of hearing the learner only and not the teacher playing the part of the dealer?

Listen to the conversation again. This time you will hear both speakers and you will be able to see the task cards for both the teacher and learner. You will find task cards below.

Discussion Points for Activity 6

- How much did the fact that you could hear the teacher rephrasing what the learner said help you to understand the questions he was asking?
- To what extent did the opportunity to see the task cards influence your ability to understand the learner? What is the implication of this for task design?
- How could you maximise communicative load and minimise the predictability for the teacher of what the learner says?

Activity 7

Design an assessment task at this level using the same context which is not so predictable.
Task cards (for Activity 6)

Interlocutor card

Someone makes enquiries about the car you advertised for sale.

Give the following information:

- 1996
- Air conditioning, power steering, 4 doors
- Registration paid up until April 2005
- Red
- Single owner
- Good condition
- Ask when the person would like to see it
- Accept his or her time of day. Learner card

Interlocutor card

You have found this advertisement for the private sale of a car you wish to buy.

Mitsubishi Magna sedan, drives well / $15 998

Talk to the seller and ask questions to find out the following information:

- Year
- Air conditioning
- Power steering
- Number of doors
- Registration
- Colour
- Number of owners
- Condition
- When test drive.
Part 5: Learner performances for other activities

In the final part of the DVD six samples of learner performances have been provided to help refine your understanding of what you mean by intelligibility.

Samples 8 – 10 are for Certificate II learners and samples 11 – 13 are for Certificate III learners.

All of the samples provided, show learners performing assessment tasks for spoken learning outcomes.

You can use these samples to:

• Further clarify shared understandings of intelligibility.
• Moderate assessments of student performance on the intelligibility criteria.
• Practise using the assessment tool.
• Consider different aspects of task design (e.g., predictability, communicative load, role of the teacher and context).
• To work with students on various aspects of the learner’s performance.
A Defining intelligibility

Intelligibility is a more achievable and desirable goal for most adult learners than trying to reach a native-like pronunciation. After all, many people who speak English as their native language have different accents and may, as adults, change the area or country they live in without changing their accents significantly.

However, intelligibility is a complex concept – we need to be very clear about what we mean when we use it to make assessments. In particular, listening is a creative process, and the person listening to a speaker is an important ingredient in determining whether or not the speaker is considered intelligible.

Intelligibility involves the hearer and speaker, as well as contextual factors:

Hearer factors:

Familiarity with the accent, experience in listening to accents, ability and expertise in understanding different accents, hearing, inferencing skills, attitude to the ethnic group with a similar accent, knowledge of topic etc.

Speaker factors:

Pronunciation (eg stress, rhythm, intonation, voice quality and sounds), delivery (eg hesitations, uncertainty, volume), grammar, sound symbol relationships.

Contextual factors:

Background noise, predictability of language in context. Two people can judge the intelligibility of the same speaker considerably differently.

When we say their utterances are intelligible we may mean that:

• we can understand what they are saying, or
• it is easy to understand them, or
• their accent is not too strong, or
• we understand ‘enough’ of what they are saying.
But how much do we have to understand, or how easy should it be to understand, someone that we judge to be intelligible?

Pronunciation has always been a consideration in assessing our students’ speaking. However, it has only been since the reaccreditation of the CSWE in 2003 that assessment criteria relating to pronunciation have been incorporated into every spoken outcome at levels I to III. This has been done primarily through the notion of intelligibility. While this encourages teachers to give pronunciation the time and attention that it deserves in the classroom, the criterion of intelligibility presents challenges to the assessing teacher.

Criteria used in assessment of intelligibility

CSWE I

Module B LO1 Can provide basic personal information using spoken language

Criterion: uses correct word stress

Module C LO1 Can participate in a short spoken transactional exchange
Module C LO2 Can conduct a short telephone conversation
Module D LO1 Can give a spoken description
Module D LO2 Can tell a short recount
Module E LO1 Can give spoken instructions

Criterion: pronounces key utterances intelligibly

CSWE II

Module A LO2 Can participate in short casual conversation on general topics
Module A LO3 Can negotiate a spoken transaction for goods and services
Module D LO2 Can participate in spoken transaction to obtain information
Module E LO1 Can leave a telephone message
Module E LO2 Can participate in a short conversational discussion
Module F LO1 Can participate in a short conversation involving a recount
Module F LO2 Can participate in a short interaction involving explanation

Criterion: pronounces key utterances intelligibly
CSWE III

Module A LO2  Can provide a spoken explanation
Criterion: pronounces key utterances intelligibly

Module A LO3  Can participate in a discussion
Criterion: pronounces key vocabulary items correctly and uses appropriate stress and intonation patterns

Module C LO2  Can participate in a casual conversation with topic changes
Module D LO2  Can participate in a transactional telephone conversation
Module E LO2  Can negotiate a complex problematic spoken exchange
Module F LO2  Can participate in an interview
Module G LO2  Can deliver a short oral presentation
Criterion: pronounces key utterances intelligibly and uses appropriate rhythm and intonation patterns

Note: pronunciation is assessed in slightly different ways in the various spoken outcomes, but at all levels teachers must assess whether learners can pronounce key utterances intelligibly in the majority of the learning outcomes.
B Developing a shared understanding of intelligibility in assessment

A study investigating how AMEP teachers and other members of the community assessed the intelligibility of learners at CSWE 1 level found that:

- Teachers tend to estimate they were actually able to understand more, of what learners say than members of the general public can
- Individuals vary enormously in the way they rate intelligibility
- Intelligibility is a combination of:
  - how much we estimate we can understand
  +
  - how hard it is for us to understand

It does not mean how much we actually can understand.

This means, that when we are judging the intelligibility of a speaker, we are really judging a combination of how much we think we can understand and how difficult we find it to understand what they are saying, (in other words, how hard we have to work to understand the speaker).

Assessing for intelligibility

When assessing the intelligibility of a speaker, it is important to agree as much as possible on the extent to which we are assessing:

- how much we understand a speaker
- how hard we have to work in order to understand a speaker.

We also need to decide the perspective from which we are making assessments: is it from our own as teachers or, as Fraser (2000) suggests, from the perspective of ‘an Australian of average goodwill’?

It would be useful to feed our insights from assessing our students into our teaching so that we can target those areas that will be of most benefit to them.
Designing tasks

When we listen to someone, we use many different cues from the context in order to understand what the speaker is saying. Task design can therefore be an important influence on our perceptions of the intelligibility of a speaker during an assessment task. This means, when we design assessment tasks we need to ensure they require the learner to say something that isn’t totally predictable.

The content of many assessment tasks is so predictable we do not really need to understand what the learners are saying at all – this is often compounded by teacher and learner ‘cue cards’ which can have the effect of sequencing and scripting responses. If we already know, or can very easily guess, what a speaker is saying, we do not need to be able to understand what they are actually saying.

One way to ensure we actually understand what a learner is saying is to create a communicative gap – a good assessment task from the point of view of assessing intelligibility would be one in which the learner has to communicate something the listener doesn’t already know or cannot easily predict.

For example, in a CSWE l assessment task, such as providing a spoken description, learners are typically asked to describe a picture the learner and listener can see. However, if we get the learner to choose one picture from a whole range of pictures that they can both see, then the listener must use the spoken description to identify which picture is being described, and so on.

Moderation

In order to make fair assessments it is important teachers share a view of intelligibility. This involves participating in moderation activities in which they can:

- Clarify shared understanding of intelligibility
- Moderate assessments of students’ performance on the intelligibility criteria

Consider different aspects of task design (eg predictability, communicative load, role of the teacher, and context).
Notes