

In conversation, tests can be conducted on the same lines above, i.e. aural-oral aids can be used and the students' comprehension of a recorded piece is evaluated through carefully prepared questions about it. (16) An alternative testing device is for the teacher to invite his students to talk, uninterrupted, about a topic derived from a radio or television programme, or film, record their conversation on tape, and then go through the tape at leisure for analysis and evaluation. (17)

For testing purposes, conversation and written composition could be made to complement each other in this way. The students could be given a set of conversational phrases (18) and then asked to imagine and write a dialogue of, say, two pages where these phrases might occur. Alternately, the students could be invited to write a conversation or discussion between two or more people about a suggested topic. The end product here could take the form of a short play, and the best effort, to the teacher's mind, could be read out loud in class by the writer, or indeed it could be acted also in class. This technique would, in our estimation, create a healthy and competitive atmosphere among the students, and indeed plan a perfect marriage between the spoken and written forms [of the language, i.e. between the two most difficult of the four language skills. (19)

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16. *For testing purposes, we believe that a recorded dialogue should be played only once.*
 17. *If the class is too big, it can be divided into groups, each having its own topic to talk about, and its own time as well.*
 18. *See Ball, W.J., A Practical Guide to Colloquial Idiom, Longmans, 1961.*
 19. *Throughout this paper, we have concentrated on conversation as we have already tackled composition in the previous issue of this periodical.*

in connected speech.(11)Third, the whole piece of conversation, or play , is played back again non-stop to help the students grasp everything, i.e. general drift, details and all.

As a change from the work with the tape-recorder or record-player, the teacher could stimulate conversation in class about films and radio and television programmes, especially those in English.(12)These conversations could be recorded on tape, and then played back in class for remedial purposes. Occasionally, the teacher could ask a small group of students of, say, three or four to volunteer and talk about a topic they like in front of the whole class. In the course of the conversation, the teacher steps into the background, listens with the rest of the class, and butts in whenever he feels necessary to make corrections. And in so far as pronunciation is concerned, we feel that the model to adopt should be the variety of English spoken by educated natives in south-east England, which is often referred to as Received Pronunciation(R.P.for short), that is 'accepted pronunciation'.(13) To take this sort of English as a model is not without grounds. First and foremost,R.P.is easily understood almost everywhere in the English-speaking world.(14)Secondly, the present writer, a British graduate, is now handling the subject with forth-year students of English at the University of Mosul. Thirdly , nearly all tapes and gramophone records of English speech , available at our disposal, are based on R.P.(15).

11. See Haddock, N., *Practice in Spoken English* , Cambridge University Press, 1959. See also O'Connor, J.D. , *Better English Pronunciation*, CUP, 1971, pp. 114-162; and Pring, J.T., *Colloquial English Pronunciation*, Longmans, 1960, pp. 35-68.
12. *We often have some very good English, American, and Australian {serials and films on TV and in the cinema.*
13. See O'Connor, op. cit., p. 7.
14. See Jones, D., *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, Dent, 1972, p. XVIII.
15. *For discussions about different accents of English, see the following:*
 - a. Abercrombie, op. cit., pp. 41-56.
 - b. Gimson, A.C., "The Transmission of Language" in Quirk. R., *The Use of English*, Longmans, 1963, pp. 277-283.
 - c. Tataru, A., "On the Specific Character of Pronunciation," *ELT*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, 1969, pp. 26-27.
 - d. Windsor Lewis, J., "The American and British Accents of English," *ELT*, Vol. XXV, No. 3, 1971, pp. 239-248.

the four-year B.A. course,(8)and these pieces could be followed up in this way. The teacher could invite the students to suggest a topic for discussion in class , introduce it himself for a few minutes , then declare it open to the class. (9) As the students exchange their contributions, the teacher acts as a guide , butting in when he sees fit to set the drift of conversation on the track intended or to offer corrections to errors made .

An alternative , or indeed a complementary technique to the above,aural-oral aids, like the tape-recorder or record-player, should be used in class, if available. Recorded conversations, or modern plays,(10)should be played at least three times before any discussion, or commentary, about them takes place. First, the whole piece of conversation, or play, should be played all the way through, without stoppage or interruption, to help the students get the general drift. Second, the piece or play is played back slowly, stopping at the end of each utterance, or as often as the teacher thinks necessary, and drawing the students' attention to , and then explaining, important points like conversational expressions, pronunciation problems, especially weak forms, stress, rhythm and intonation, and how these features operate

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8. *See MacCarthy , P.A.D., English Conversation Reader, Longmans, 1964. See also Judd, J.O., English Conversation for Foreign Students, George G. Harrap, 1966; Ball, W.J., Selected Texts of Modern Dialogue, Longmans, 1962, Conversational English, Longmans, 1962, and Close, R.A., English Conversation Practice for Students Going to Britain, George Allen and Unwin, 1965. This last reference could be used effectively with fourth-year students who might sometime in the future go to Britain for postgraduate studies or other purposes.*
 9. *For obvious reasons, the teacher should preferably be a native speaker of English or, failing to get a native speaker, the teacher with the nearest accent should take English conversation.*
 10. *We believe that plays are a form of guided, or refined, conversation. We insist that plays used for this purpose should be modern for the sake of both language and content.*

so to speak, as is the case with speaking. (2) Furthermore, in speech suprasegmental considerations of pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation have to be reckoned with so that the end product would sound as native as possible. These considerations are obviously non-existent in writing.

In fact, conversation has always proved most difficult for the English language students, both junior and senior, of the University of Mosul. (3) If these are asked to exchange views, with the teacher or among themselves, about something within their factual background, they often show incompetence to go beyond a few stumbling utterances which are in themselves full of language mistakes. (4) This is obviously due to lack of practice in English conversation, conversation about interesting, stimulating and real-life topics; and this lack stems from the fallacy that conversation as such cannot be taught. Well, of course it can, (5) and in a separate lesson too, but not through tiny exercises in conversation that consist of a few utterances between a couple of speakers, one or two sentences each. (6) Admittedly, these little pieces inculcate certain responses and expressions pertinent to the spoken form of the language, and can be used at earlier stages; but used on their own, they are not enough to teach conversation at higher levels. (7) Longer pieces, where purely conversational responses and expressions occur accidentally as the situation requires, could be used *throughout*

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2. *We do not mean here imaginative professional writing, which is definitely more difficult than ordinary speech. We simply mean writing pieces of coherent composition by foreign learners of the language.*
 3. *The writer is focusing on these students since they are the source of his teaching experience.*
 4. *The writer has recorded on tape some of these conversations held in class with both junior and senior students.*
 5. *See Baird, A., "The 'Conversation' Lesson," ELT, Vol. XXII, No. 2, Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 129.*
 6. *See Jerrom, M.F., and Szkutnik, L.L., Conversation Exercises in Everyday English: Books One and Two, Longmans, 1965. See also Taylor, G., English Conversation Practice, McGraw-Hill, 1967.*
 7. *Two years ago, these short pieces were being used with second and third-year students of English at the University of Mosul in their conversation hours.*

AN APPROACH TO ENGLISH CONVERSATION WITH IRAQI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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We maintain that the most difficult of the four skills involved in learning a foreign language are speaking and writing. The other two skills being listening and reading. The former couple of skills are active because they are productive, whereas the latter ones are passive as they are receptive or absorptive, and production is always more difficult than reception. (1) In speaking and writing, the learner has to put into operation the absorbed, or dormant, language units of vocabulary, structure, stress, rhythm and intonation in such a way as to achieve intelligibility. If this goal is not achieved, communication breaks down and the learning process is proved a failure. But in listening and reading, both silent and aural, the learner is exposed to bits of language, short or long, and the amount acquired depends wholly on the listener's, or reader's, mastery of the language. There is, therefore, no real production, no actual usage, involved in these two skills.

Speaking a foreign language is, in its turn, more difficult than writing it, since the former is spontaneous and has to be produced on the spot as the situation requires. The latter skill, writing, is not so difficult, because the writer has plenty of time to go through what he has written, make corrections and alterations, till perfection in his opinion is attained. In this exercise, there is really no listener waiting for response, no sense of urgency

1. See Abercrombie, D., *Problems and Principles in Language Study*, Longmans, pp. 16-17.