

Lesson Plan 1 (Oral Communication)**Richard McDorman****Title: Talking about Unfamiliar Topics****Language skills emphasized: Listening and speaking (focus on meaning)*****General Information***

Name/type of class: General Purpose Immersion Program (GPIP), a general (non-academic) intensive English program for adult learners in Miami, Florida. This program emphasizes the development of speaking and listening skills and places a secondary emphasis on reading and writing.

Class size: 6-8 students

Proficiency level: Low Intermediate (level 2 in a 5 level program; each level requires one twelve-week academic quarter to complete). The proficiency level of learners in this class ranges from 1+ to 2+ on the ILR language proficiency scale (this is the official proficiency scale used by the school).

Length of lesson: 2 hours, 30 minutes

Overall instructional goals of the lesson:

After completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- a) Improve their comprehension of aural input (listening texts and interactive speech) involving unfamiliar topics.
- b) Improve their comprehension of questions about unfamiliar topics.
- c) Talk about unfamiliar topics with improved fluency and greater confidence.
- d) Respond appropriately to questions about unfamiliar topics.

Learning Objectives:

- a) To use context clues to guess the meaning of unfamiliar content words
- b) To recognize and identify common hesitation markers used in spoken English, including *um, uh, well, sort of (sorta), kind of (kinda), like, actually, so* and *you know (ya know)*
- c) To compare hesitation markers/devices in English and the students' native language(s)
- d) To use hesitation markers to improve fluency and confidence when making impromptu speeches on unfamiliar topics
- e) To use hesitation markers to improve fluency and confidence when participating in conversations on unfamiliar topics

Justification of Lesson:

During my observation of this class (i.e., the class I observed for the *Teaching Project*), I noticed that much of the students' oral production was halting and characterized by hesitation and long pauses while generally lacking hesitation markers, especially when students were required to talk about unfamiliar topics. According to Lazarson (2001), "using hesitation markers is a speaking strategy that is an acceptable, if not preferred, alternative to silence..." By learning to use hesitation markers, students can achieve improved fluency and increased confidence, thereby becoming better equipped to speak about unfamiliar topics and negotiate meaning when interacting in English. Moreover, by learning to use context clues to guess the approximate meaning of key content words, students can improve their listening comprehension skills, expand their expressive range and increase the comprehensibility of the aural input to which they are exposed, which should support their efforts to acquire English.

Materials needed:

- a) Whiteboard and dry erase marker
- b) CD player
- c) Computer
- d) Video projector
- e) Sound system
- f) Authentic audio sample (a short news segment) and video sample (a television interview)
- g) Handouts ([transcript of news segment](#) and [vocabulary exercise](#))

Lesson Plan

ORIENTATION (10 minutes)

The class will begin with a short discussion (warm-up activity) on how students deal with unfamiliar topics when interacting in English. The instructor will ask students the following questions:

- 1) What is meant by an *unfamiliar topic*? (*If necessary, the instructor can present some examples of topics that are likely to be unfamiliar to the students.*)
- 2) Are some topics more unfamiliar than others? Why or why not?
- 3) How do they respond to questions about topics they are unfamiliar with or that contain one or two key content words they do not understand? *Important:* Make sure students understand what a *content word* is. If necessary, provide examples of *content words* and *function words*.
- 4) Have they ever "gotten stuck" (make sure students understand what this means) when having to talk about an unfamiliar topic in English?
- 5) What strategies, if any, do they use when responding to questions about unfamiliar topics? (*Have students brainstorm strategies and write them on the whiteboard.*)

PRESENTATION (40 minutes)

Presentation Activity 1: Brainstorming familiar topics and distinguishing familiar and unfamiliar topics (10 minutes)

The instructor will ask each student to bring up one or two topics they are familiar with and can talk about easily and confidently in English (*examples*: sports, food, music, clothing, their home country and cultures, the United States and its cultures, etc.). The instructor will make a list, writing each presented topic on the whiteboard. As each student presents her familiar topics, the instructor will ask the student why she thinks these topics are familiar to her (i.e., due to knowledge of English, real world knowledge, culturally-derived knowledge, life experience, formal education, other reasons, or some combination of these). Once the list has been developed, the students will be asked to categorize each topic as familiar or unfamiliar (this list will be used later during the engagement portion of the lesson). Students will then be asked whether each unfamiliar topic is unfamiliar because they do not know or are unsure of the meaning of the word or phrase in English or because they do not have real-world knowledge about the topic. The instructor will then ask students why this matters. (*One important reason is that if students have real world knowledge about the topic but just do not know the word or phrase in English, once they understand the meaning of the word or phrase, they may be able to talk about the topic in English.*)

Presentation Activity 2: Discussing strategies for negotiating meaning when presented with questions on unfamiliar topics (10 minutes)

The instructor will then ask students what they can do when someone asks them a question about an unfamiliar topic. Students will be asked to consider the following scenarios and talk about specific strategies they use to negotiate meaning and improve comprehension. (*Some common strategies include asking the speaker to repeat the question, asking for clarification, asking the speaker to rephrase the question, asking the speaker to define a specific term, etc.*)

- They completely understand the question, but are unfamiliar with the topic due to lack of real-world knowledge. (*Possible example: What are the main rules of American football?*)
- They understand most of the question, except for one key word or phrase. (*Possible example: How many points does a team get for kicking a field goal?*)
- They understand part of the question, but do not understand one or more key phrases. (*Possible example: In American football, what is the difference between a touchdown and a touchback?*)
- They understand all of the vocabulary, including the key words and phrases in the question, but do not understand the question for grammatical reasons. (*Possible example: If some of the rules of American football were changed, what other sports might it be more similar to?*)
- They do not understand the question at all. (*Possible example: When the punt returner calls for a fair catch, how many yards is the kicking team penalized for violating the returner's halo?*)

The instructor will then present the following additional strategies for improving comprehension of questions involving unfamiliar topics (assuming that students have not already mentioned them):

- ✓ Identifying key words or repeated words in order to understand the theme/main idea.
- ✓ Using context clues to guess the meaning of unfamiliar content words.
- ✓ Asking the speaker to repeat or rephrase the question.
- ✓ Specifically identifying unfamiliar vocabulary and asking the speaker to paraphrase or define the term.

Presentation Activity 3: Strategies for talking about unfamiliar topics and using hesitation markers (10 minutes)

Next, the instructor will ask students what specific strategies they have for talking about topics that are unfamiliar to them. Do students ever find themselves “stuck” in a conversation because they are unfamiliar with the topic? Do they become frustrated, embarrassed or uncomfortable when they are interacting in English and an unfamiliar topic is brought up? *(Let students know that this is a natural response, but that part of the goal of today’s lesson is to provide them with strategies for managing these stressful interactions.)*

The instructor will now ask students if they know any English words that they can use to delay or slow down their speech, in order to gain extra time to think about their statements or answers to questions. The instructor will write the words on the whiteboard. If students do not know any such words or do not understand what is being elicited, provide examples of and pre-teach the following *hesitation markers* commonly used in spoken English:

1. *um* (Um, I’m not sure about that.)
2. *uh* (Uh, could you say that again?) *Point out that “um” and “uh” are interchangeable.*
3. *well* (Well, um, maybe.)
4. *sort of (sorta)* (I, um, sorta did that once too.)
5. *kind of (kinda)* (I kinda know what you mean.) *Point out that “sorta” and “kinda” are usually interchangeable.*
6. *like* (Like, uh, can you say that a different way?)
7. *actually* (Actually, I, uh, think I’ve been there before.)
8. *so* (So, do you wanna come with us?)
9. *you know (ya know)* (It’s, like, really important, ya know.)

Presentation Activity 4: Comparing hesitation markers in English and students’ L1 (10 minutes)

The instructor will invite students to talk about how they delay or slow down their speech to create additional time to provide an answer or make a statement in their native language(s). Do students’ native languages have words similar to the hesitation markers presented above? *(Most if not all languages do.)* Ask students to provide examples of hesitation markers in their native language. Which of those hesitation markers *serve the same function* as the English hesitation markers presented? *(Note: It is not necessary for students to try to provide translations or lexical*

equivalents. Rather, students should try to provide functional equivalents—words that achieve the same function, even if they do not mean exactly the same thing).

Have students complete the following chart to emphasize similarities and differences in hesitation markers/devices in English and their L1. Point out to students that the equivalent native language strategy could be a word, stock phrase, pause or other mechanism. Let students know that their native language may use a single word or phrase where English uses more than one, or vice-versa (example: a student’s native language may have only one equivalent word for English *um* and *uh*, or it may have more than one equivalent word for English *so*).

English hesitation marker	Equivalent or similar native language strategy or strategies
<i>um</i>	
<i>uh</i>	
<i>well</i>	
<i>soft of (sorta)</i>	
<i>kind of (kinda)</i>	
<i>like</i>	
<i>actually</i>	
<i>so</i>	
<i>you know (ya know)</i>	

ENGAGEMENT (40 minutes)

Once each of the three main presentation points have been covered, the instructor will initiate the engagement portion of the lesson with the following listening activity.

Engagement Activity 1: Listening to a news story to identify key words and phrases and unfamiliar topics (20 minutes)

The instructor will play an audio file on a topic that is likely to partially familiar to students, with some unfamiliar words, phrases and ideas (“\$11,000 Machine Offers Exquisite Coffee Experience”) consisting of a short (approximately one minute) news segment that aired on National Public Radio on October 2, 2012. The news story will be played five times. During each play, students will be asked to focus on a different task and will be given explicit instructions for how to complete each listening task. A short group discussion during which students will have the opportunity to ask questions will follow each task. Once the recording has been played five times and the students have completed each listening task, the instructor will give the students a [transcript of the recording](#).

1. First play: *Students will listen for main ideas and themes.*
2. Second play: *Students will listen for key words and phrases. Students will be reminded to use context clues to guess the meaning of unfamiliar terms.*
3. Third play: *Students will identify (write down) key words and phrases. Students will be informed not to worry about how to spell unfamiliar words (they should just do their best; the instructor will let them know how to spell the words later).*

4. Fourth play: *Students will listen for unfamiliar topics and words. Students should indicate whether the topic is unfamiliar because they do not know or are unsure about the meaning of a word, or because they do not have real word knowledge about the topic.*
5. Fifth play: *Students will identify (write down) unfamiliar topics and words (again, doing their best as far as spelling is concerned).*

Source of audio file:

<http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=3&islist=true&id=3&d=10-02-2012>

After completing the structured listening activity described above, as a post-listening activity, the instructor will invite the students to provide their opinion on the information from the listening text, being sure to bring up words that were unfamiliar and describe their strategies for trying to guess the meaning of those words. Some of the points for discussion might include:

- Who would pay \$11,000 for a coffee machine?
- If you could afford it, would you buy this machine? Why or why not?
- Do you think any coffee maker can be worth this much money?
- What are the special features of this coffee maker?
- What does the speaker mean when she says the coffee maker “has the whiff of rocket science about it”? (*Have students try to use context clues to guess the meaning of “whiff.”*)
- What are BMW, Tesla and NASA? (*Try to get students to recognize that they are names of companies*)

Engagement Activity 2: Listening for and identifying hesitation markers (20 minutes)

The instructor will play an approximately six minute video interview of famous skateboarder Nyjah Huston from the talk show *The Daily Habit*. The video will be played twice. During the first play, students will be asked to try to listen for main ideas. During the second play, students will be asked to identify as many of the hesitation markers they learned about during the presentation portion of the lesson as they can, as well as any others they may recognize. As a post-listening activity, students will work in pairs to compare their lists and then report back to the group on how many (and which) hesitation markers they were able to identify.

The instructor will ask students what they think about the fact that so many hesitation markers were used during the interview. Some of the questions for discussion and engagement might include:

- What does the frequency of these hesitation markers tell you about how important they are to understanding spoken English?
- How do you think you can use hesitation markers in your own English to sound more fluent and natural?
- How frequently have you encountered these hesitation markers in written English?
- What does the difference in the frequency of hesitation markers in spoken and written English tell you?

- Why do you think hesitation markers are infrequent in written English?

Source of video file: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9dQLUNp50k>.

EVALUATION (45 minutes)

Evaluation Activity 1: Making impromptu speeches and answering questions about unfamiliar topics (30 minutes)

The instructor will ask students to review the lists of familiar and unfamiliar topics that they created earlier in the lesson. Each student will be asked to select one *unfamiliar* topic (i.e., a topic that is familiar to another student but unfamiliar to him or her) on which to prepare an impromptu speech of one minute. Students will have five minutes to prepare their speeches and will be allowed to use resources such as dictionaries, the internet, other students and the instructor for help during their preparations. Students will be informed that after making their impromptu speeches, they will answer questions about the topic from their classmates and receive feedback from the instructor.

During their speeches and question-and-answer sessions, students should try to use the different hesitation markers they have learned about during the class. Students will be informed that the goal of this activity is to talk about a difficult/unfamiliar topic for an entire minute while using hesitation markers as a discourse strategy.

At the end of each talk and question-and-answer session, the instructor will qualitatively evaluate each student's performance. The evaluation criteria will be as follows (students will be informed of the criteria before making their impromptu speeches):

- ✓ Overall fluency
- ✓ Effective use of hesitation markers
- ✓ Number and variety of hesitation markers used
- ✓ Comprehensibility
- ✓ Completion of the task (i.e., speaking for the entire minute)

The goal of this evaluation scheme is to provide students with useful feedback, improve their speaking confidence, and give them suggestions for further improvement, but not to issue a quantitative score or formally grade their performance (this practice is in line with the institution's policies).

Evaluation activity 2: Hesitation marker exercise (15 minutes)

As a final evaluation activity, students will complete a [*hesitation marker exercise*](#) in which they select hesitation markers to be used at various points in a dialogue. An important lesson to be learned from this activity is that different hesitation markers can be used at the same point in a conversation (i.e., some hesitation markers are interchangeable in some contexts). So there will often be more than one "right" answer, although there may be some "wrong" answers.

Students will have ten minutes to complete the activity individually. Afterwards, the instructor will lead a group discussion in which students compare and discuss their answers. The instructor will evaluate each student's performance on the activity by informing them of correct and incorrect answers while helping to guide them to correct answers for any mistakes.

EXPANSION (10 minutes)

The instructor will conclude the class by asking students to reflect on what they have learned during the lesson by considering and answering the following questions:

- ❖ What strategies have they learned for talking and answering questions about unfamiliar topics in English?
- ❖ How confident do they feel using *um, uh, well, sort of (sorta), kind of (kinda), like, actually, so* and *you know (ya know)* in their oral production? If they do not feel confident, what steps can they take to improve their level of confidence?
- ❖ How has comparing hesitation markers/devices in English and their native language(s) helped them understand the ways they can use these words and phrases to improve their oral fluency in English?
- ❖ What else can they do to apply what they have learned in class today to their real-life interactions in English?

As a take home activity, the instructor will ask students to pay special attention to the use of hesitation markers while listening to and interacting in English during the next week. In order to fully appreciate the frequency of these lexical items in everyday spoken English, students can create a *hesitation marker log* the next time they watch an unscripted television show (e.g., reality show, variety show with live interviews, game show, etc.) to record the number of times each hesitation marker they have learned about is used. This way, they can gain a deeper understanding of how and when hesitation markers are used in spoken English. (*Justification for this activity*: research has shown that as language learners become more aware of the specific lexical or grammatical features in their input, they are more likely to acquire those features and incorporate them in their oral production).

Transcript of Audio Recording

<i>Steve Inskip</i>	And that brings us to today's last word in business, which is "Blossom 1." Blossom 1 is not the name of a new car, though it is nearly as expensive as some.
<i>Renée Montagne</i>	It's a coffee maker! Designed by some folks who've worked for the likes of BMW, Tesla Motors and NASA. Coming in at a little over eleven thousand dollars, the coffee maker does have the whiff of rocket science about it.
<i>Steve Inskip</i>	The whiff of something! There's a built-in camera and Wi-Fi. The camera is for scanning which type of beans you have. The Wi-Fi is for downloading a specific recipe for those beans. We have no idea what the maker does if you were to load it with some Folgers. And that's the business news on Morning Edition, from NPR news. I'm Steve Inskip.
<i>Renée Montagne</i>	And I'm Renée Montagne.

Hesitation Marker Exercise

Instructions: Fill in each blank with one of the following hesitation markers. There may be more than one correct answer for a given blank. Please select from among the hesitation markers that you learned about in today's class:

um uh well sort of kind of like actually so you know

Martin: _____, have you started the new job yet?
Ines: Yep. _____, I've been there for over a week.
Martin: _____, is it going OK?
Ines: _____. The first week went OK.
Martin: _____, were you in the deep end on day one?
Ines: No, it wasn't too bad, _____. I, _____, had a pretty good day, _____.
Martin: _____, great. That's, _____, good to hear.
Ines: _____, what about you? How's your job going?
Martin: _____, that's a hard question.
Ines: Why so hard? Are you _____ having some problems at work?
Martin: _____, I _____ lost my job last week.
Ines: Really? _____, I'm sorry to hear that. I _____ didn't know.
Martin: _____, that's alright. I _____ haven't told anyone yet, _____.
Ines: _____, let's change the subject. Have you, _____, had lunch yet?
Martin: _____, no, I haven't, _____.
Ines: _____, would you like to go downstairs and, _____, grab a bite to eat?
Martin: Sure. _____, just give me a few minutes to get ready.
Ines: Great. I think they're having a special on lasagna, _____.
Martin: I _____ love lasagna!
Ines: Yeah, me too. _____, _____, just call me whenever you're ready
Martin: Will do.

Possible Answers

Martin: Uh, have you started the new job yet?
Ines: Yep. Actually, I've been there for over a week.
Martin: So, is it going OK?
Ines: Sort of. The first week went OK.
Martin: So, were you in the deep end on day one?
Ines: No, it wasn't too bad, you know? I, um, had a pretty good day, actually.
Martin: Well, great. That's, um, good to hear.
Ines: Um, what about you? How's your job going?
Martin: Well uh, that's a hard question.

Ines: Why so hard? Are you like having some problems at work?

Martin: Um, I kind of lost my job last week.

Ines: Really? Well, I'm sorry to hear that. I like didn't know.

Martin: Uh, that's alright. I sort of haven't told anyone yet, you know?

Ines: Um, let's change the subject. Have you, like, had lunch yet?

Martin: Uh, no, I haven't, actually.

Ines: So, would you like to go downstairs and, uh, grab a bite to eat?

Martin: Sure. Um, just give me a few minutes to get ready.

Ines: Great. I think they're having a special on lasagna, actually.

Marin: I um love lasagna.

Ines: Yeah, me too. Well, you know, just call me whenever you're ready.

Martin: Will do.