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English for Academic Study: Speaking and Pronunciation

Author:	Joan McCormack, Sebastian Watkins, Jonathan Smith, Annette Margolis (2010)		
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English for Academic Study: Speaking and Pronunciation is a textbook specifically designed for upper immediate to advanced students learning English for academic purposes. This book, which combines speaking and pronunciation, allows students to develop the skills needed to communicate effectively and confidently in regular/non-ESL academic courses. The intention of this book is to prepare students to participate in classroom discussions, to successfully execute oral presentations, and to speak with improved and highly comprehensible pronunciation. One listening CD and two pronunciation CDs accompany the book. There is also a website which provides supplementary activities and additional opportunities for practice following each unit.

The speaking and pronunciation sections are presented separately. The instructor has the choice of presenting them independently or concurrently, in an integrated curriculum. The speaking section of the textbook is organized into ten units. In each unit, a speaking sub-skill is developed, such as *Supporting your point of view* or *Agreeing and disagreeing*. Additionally, each unit also focuses around a topic such as *Family* or *The World of Work*. Both the sub-skill and the topic are introduced in the unit title (e.g., *Unit 9 – Thinking rationally: Science and the paranormal*). Initially, the student is introduced

to the topic through tasks such as self-questionnaires, personal opinion queries, and group discussions. Next, they are presented to the sub-skill through activities such as reading passages, audio excerpts, and worksheets. Each unit then culminates with the planning and production of a major speaking activity, such as an oral presentation or a debate. Finally, the students review the lesson by completing both a comprehensive unit summary worksheet and a diary entry to reflect on their perceived performance. Unit 6 is a consolidation unit which integrates and reviews the previously learned material.

The sub-skills focused on in *Speaking and Pronunciation* are critical as they are each a fundamental piece in the overall goal to develop communication in an academic setting. Students will be able to apply skills learned from this book both in and out of the classroom for years to come. According to pedagogical research, combining a pre, during, and post activity is crucial in the planning of a highly productive lesson (Helgeson & Brown, 2006). This textbook successfully provides these activities and allows the students to thoroughly practice each featured speaking skill. In the pre section, the introductory activities allow students to activate background knowledge on the subject and expose students to key vocabulary and phrases. According to the authors, "it can be difficult to concentrate on both ideas and language..." (p.11). Therefore, they begin each unit by asking students to openly discuss a topic, develop their ideas, and practice using the related language. Then, the students are presented with the speaking sub-skill and given practice tasks. At this time, students are introduced to language that they can use in the context of the target sub-skill. According to Folse (2006), a good speaking activity should present not only language "in the task" (e.g., instructions, topic, expectations) but also language "for the task" (e.g., useful phrases/words that can be integrated into speech) which ultimately enable students to deliver effective presentations in the target language. *Speaking and Listening* is very successful in this component. Finally, the textbook asks students to integrate both the topic and the sub-skill in a presentation (e.g., *State your point of view about ethical working practices*). Completing these presentations offer students an introduction to the type of assignments that they will encounter in typical college classes. The unit summary worksheet and diary entry allow students to recycle learned material and language and self-reflect on personal performance. On the whole, the speaking section of this textbook is very strong and well organized.

There are a few areas within the textbook where improvements could be made. Although the speaking topics of this text are age and cultural appropriate, they may not be meaningful to all students. A teacher may opt to change the topics to fit the language goals of their particular group of students. For example, a group of business students may benefit more from altered themes such as *Interviews* or *Conference presentations*. In addition, researchers have concluded that the most successful speaking activities are "two-way" (Folse, 2006). This means that students are required to share information within pairs or groups. There are a few activities in this textbook which require information exchange. In the Unit 4 speaking activity, Student A is assigned to state his/her opinion on a subject while student B is assigned to summarize Student A.

According to Folse, two-way activities increase communicative ability by requiring that students actively listen, comprehend, and negotiate for meaning. More two-way activities could be easily included by assigning listeners to play an active role during speaking presentations. This could be achieved through required peer-evaluations or a question/answer segment. The inclusion of these types of activities would better serve the goals of this text.

The pronunciation section of the textbook follows the speaking section. In each of the 8 Units, students are introduced to both segmental and supra-segmental aspects of pronunciation. According to the authors, these aspects of pronunciation are taught through a focus on the following four concepts: the phonemic alphabet, sound/spelling relationships of words, academic vocabulary from the academic word list, and micro-listening skills. As far as segmentals, or sound units, students are initially introduced to vowel sounds, and then consonant sounds, diphthongs, and consonant clusters. Then, with regard to supra-segmentals, or other vocal effects, students practice a wide-variety of features such as word-stress, intonation, connected speech, and tone units. Students are introduced to a concept by listening to speech samples from the CD. They then practice with corresponding activities such as differentiating between minimal pairs, identifying supra-segmentals, and repeating words/phrases. Each section concludes with a Unit review that provides students with additional practice with the new information as well as a chance to reflect on overall themes. For example, they may be asked to reflect on how their pronunciation is improving or what areas seem to be most problematic. Finally, throughout the units, there are additional pronunciation notes which give tips to help the student avoid common errors.

These sections are comprehensive and cover many of the most important aspects of pronunciation. They give students sufficient practice with different activities related to each new concept. However, there is little or no communicative practice using pronunciation in authentic speech scenarios. Levis and Grant (2003) state that communicative practice, which requires students focus on both accuracy and fluency, may be highly productive in regards to pronunciation. Additionally, there are very few opportunities for self or peer evaluation in the pronunciation activities, both of which can be invaluable to a student's ability to self-monitor. Teachers can supplement the existing activities by requiring students to record their speech and evaluate it under specified criteria. Lastly, the separate presentation of the pronunciation and the speaking section may be problematic for a teacher who prefers to teach the two skills concurrently.

This book is full of lengthy passages of text and very few pictures which is appropriate for this level of learners. The material is presented well and the skills are introduced in a well-thought out progression. The tasks require students to work together on group projects that closely resemble projects they may encounter in typical college classes. The supplementary study tips give students useful learning strategies and advice.

Although a typical listening and speaking ESL course would most likely require a separate listening textbook, *English for Academic Study: Speaking and Pronunciation*, would be an excellent choice for advanced learners nearing entry into regular classes. Successful completion of this text should enable students to successfully communicate in the classroom, deliver effective presentations, speak with highly comprehensible pronunciation, and perhaps most importantly, do it with vastly improved self-confidence and poise.

References

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