

Streaming Speech

Listening and Pronunciation
for Advanced Learners of English

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Richard Cauldwell

speechinaction



To All Language Teachers who dare to deal with spontaneous speech

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FOREWORD – How to use Streaming Speech

Streaming Speech Listening and Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English is an intensive self-access and classroom course for learners of English who aspire to the highest levels of skill in listening and pronunciation. It uses recordings of spontaneous speech in new ways which enable learners to engage with fast natural speech so that they can learn to perceive and understand more quickly, and pronounce/speak more fluently.

There are three components to *Streaming Speech*: this Teacher's Guide, a Student's Book, and the electronic publication – on CD-ROM, in computer clusters, and online. The electronic publication is essential: you, and your students, need it to use *Streaming Speech*, therefore you need a computer with soundcard and speakers, a microphone, and a projector so that all students can see the contents of the screen.

Streaming Speech takes the view that listening and speaking/pronunciation are two sides of the same coin – the coin being the spoken language. It does not follow the traditional view of listening being twinned with reading as a receptive skill.

Streaming Speech is best used in a mixture of classroom, self-access, and tutorial modes.

The Goals of Streaming Speech.

Streaming Speech has two sets of goals, one for listening, the other for pronunciation. The goals are for advanced, or upper-intermediate (aspiring advanced) students.

Listening

To make learners familiar and comfortable with the the stream of speech (at speeds up to 450 words per minute) and the way in which this stream is shaped by the speaker to communicate meanings.

- To improve the learners' perception of words in the stream of speech.
- To show how speakers change the sound-shapes of words.
- To show the relationship between slow and fast speech.

Pronunciation

To help learners improve their ability to produce flowing stretches of speech, at natural speeds, and patterned in a way which effectively communicates their meanings and maintains the interest of their listeners.

- To improve the accuracy of vowels and consonants within the stream of speech.
- To increase the learners' confidence to speak by presenting natural models of rhythm and intonation.
- To increase the learner's confidence to speak by providing them with strategies to compose speech in real-time.

Notes on the goals

The right type of pronunciation practice improves listening ability. The pronunciation exercises in *Streaming Speech* therefore serve both listening goals and pronunciation goals . As learners imitate the faster stretches of speech and try to match the speed of the native speaker models (using the listen/imitate/record/compare methodology) they will speak at speeds that they are not accustomed

to. They are likely to find this difficult – but it is important for them to go beyond their comfort zone – because as they practice pronunciation in this way, (listening, imitating, recording, and comparing) they are 'handling' the stream of speech with their ears, mouths, short & medium-term memory, and those parts of the brain that are associated with perceiving and understanding speech. In so doing, they improve their capacity to perceive and understand fast spontaneous speech.

It is not the purpose of *Streaming Speech* to make learners speak as fast as native speakers. Many expert speakers of English (of all nationalities) do not speak at the fast speeds of *Streaming Speech*. However, practising speech at these speeds will almost certainly improve listening, and while learners may resist speaking at (say) 400 words per minute, the capacity to speak at variable speeds up to 300 words per minute may well be useful.

The Structure of Streaming Speech

The central chapters, Chapters 1-8, have six sections each. Each of these chapters starts with two screens of introduction (a Welcome and a Goals screen) and then embarks on a three-part pattern: Listening, Discourse Features (learn about speech), Pronunciation.

Listening (Sections 1-2)

The listening part begins with a conventional listening comprehension exercise: learners listen to a recording and select answers focusing on parts of the recording which are going to be inspected later in the chapter. They may be the fastest parts of the recording, or parts which have examples of typical speech patterns – such as rhythm or intonation. In Section 2 (Focus) the part of the recording that contains the evidence for the answers is presented on screen so that learners can see, click, and hear the original as often as they want.

Discourse Features (Section 3)

The second part of the teaching pattern is a 'learn about speech' section. It explains how, and in what ways, speech is streamlike. Speech is not a sequence of isolated words: for example not 'drama-and-that-kind-of-thing' but 'dramarantakindothing'. Learners are first guided to notice features of the stream of speech (e.g. linking, rhythm, falling tones, level tones) and then asked to observe the same features for themselves in exercises that can either be done on-screen or in the Student's Book.

Pronunciation (Sections 4 & 5)

Pronunciation begins with a reminder of the relationship between sounds and dictionary symbols, and a short exercise in which learners test their ability to match sound and symbol. They then work on the speech sounds of English by listening, imitating, recording and comparing themselves with the extracts of real speech. There are two speech units for each target sound – the target sound is contained in a prominent syllable, which is indicated in bold. The learner's task is to pronounce the target sound reasonably accurately, on time, at the same speed as the original. Learners record their attempts, and compare them to the original. There is a pop-up screen to help them progress from slow paused speech to a fluent imitation of one of the speech-units in the table. The pronunciation ends with a pronunciation task (Section 5) asking learners to imitate several speech-units which make up a meaningful chunk of speech. Practising pronunciation of a larger chunk of speech like this increases the learner's ability to speak with appropriate variability of a kind that is best experienced over longer stretches of speech.

Review (Section 6)

Each of Chapters 1-8 ends with a review screen. If they learners have got 50% or more on the exercises, they get a screen which reviews the contents of the chapter, and gives them their score. If they have got less than 50% on the exercises, then the screen encourages them to return to the

chapter and spend more time and effort doing the exercises.

Chapter 9 Segments Workshop

Chapter 9 is a pronunciation workshop. It offers learners a choice of voice model. They can choose to work with one or more of six speakers (all of whom have featured earlier in Chapters 1-6) on all the vowel and consonant sounds of English. There are three female, and three male, voices to choose from. For each of the voices, there are four screens: two for vowels, and two for consonants. There is also a 'Cluster-buster' area with two screens of consonant clusters that appear at the beginning of words, and two screens that deal with clusters at the ends of words. The screens are similar to those that occur in sections 4 of Chapters 1-8 – and require the learner to listen and imitate the original recordings, record themselves, and compare their recording to the original. This chapter can be worked on out of sequence: it is not necessary for learners to work through all of Chapters 1-8 before working here.

Chapter 10 A window on speech

Chapter 10 is an intensive teacher-training course for those teachers who are interested in using the techniques of *Streaming Speech* with other recordings. It is in three sections: the first section consists of a description of the concept of the speech unit; the second deals with tones and other pitch movements (key); the third gives guided practice in transcribing recordings. This chapter is demanding. To make it less demanding, it is worthwhile doing all of the sections 3 of Chapters 1-8 prior to starting.

Teaching Streaming Speech

Streaming Speech is flexible. It can be taught either as a primarily self-access course with teacher monitoring in either the classroom or in tutorial (cf Teaching Plan 'A' below) or as a classroom-based course with time equally divided between classroom and self-access work (cf. Teaching Plan 'B' below).

The electronic version has been designed for self-study by students whose command of the written language is high, but whose listening and speaking skills need improvement. It has a number of features to help students who do not have a teacher to guide and advise them: it is easy to navigate, and contains explanations on screen (many of them in pop-up boxes), and self-assessment exercises.

Whether you use *Streaming Speech* as a classroom-based course, or as a self-access course, it is best introduced to learners in the classroom. If they are advanced independent learners, they can then do most of the work themselves in self-access; if your learners require more guidance, then *Streaming Speech* can form the basis of a mixed mode course – Sections 1-3 of each chapter taught in the classroom, and Sections 4-5 in self-access.

Independent learners

For independent learners, who are sufficiently advanced to understand most of the explanations on screen, 'Teaching Pattern A' is recommended. This pattern begins with a teacher introduction in the classroom, and then learners work through the *Streaming Speech* three chapters at a time. After each group of three chapters, the teacher monitors progress and pronunciation.

Teaching pattern 'A'

Introduction	Classroom	1 hour
Chapters 1-3	Self-access	4-5 hours
Monitor progress	Classroom	1 hour
Monitor pronunciation	Tutorial	10 minutes per learner
Chapters 4-6	Self-access	4-5 hours
Monitor progress	Classroom	1 hour
Monitor pronunciation	Tutorial	10 minutes per learner
Chapters 7-9	Self-access	4-5 hours
Monitor progress	Classroom	1 hour
Monitor pronunciation	Tutorial	10 minutes per learner

Notes:

- Chapter 10 is an optional teacher-training course which has not been included in the above figures. Allow at least two hours for Chapter 10, if you plan to teach it.
- 'Classroom' work can also be done in a teaching computer cluster. If it is done in a classroom, the classroom needs to be equipped with a computer and a projector.
- The timings given are approximate. Based on these figures, and a class of ten advanced learners, the teaching time required is 9 hours. This is made up of 4 hours in the classroom, 5 hours monitoring pronunciation (10 students x 10 minutes x 3). The learning time is between 16 and 20 hours, of which 4 hours are spent in the classroom, between 12 and 15 in self-access, and approximately half an hour having pronunciation monitored.

Learners needing teacher-guidance

For learners who require more teacher guidance, the recommended pattern of work is 'Teaching pattern 'B', in which the teacher guides learners, in classroom time, through Sections 1-3 of each chapter, and then learners work on Sections 4-5 in self-access. In this pattern, pronunciation is monitored every two chapters.

Teaching pattern 'B'

Introduction		Classroom	1 hour
Chapter 1	Sections 1-3	Classroom	1 hour
	Sections 4-5	Self-access	1 hour
Chapter 2	Sections 1-3	Classroom	1 hour
	Sections 4-5	Self-access	1 hour
	Monitor pronunciation	Tutorial	5 minutes per learner
This pattern is repeated for Chapters 3 & 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8.			
Chapter 9	Learners choose one section	Self-access	1 hour
	Monitor pronunciation	Tutorial	5 minutes per learner

Notes

- Chapter 10 is an optional teacher-training course which has not been included in the above figures. Allow at least two hours for Chapter 10, if you plan to teach it.
- 'Classroom' work can also be done in a teaching computer cluster. If it is done in a classroom, the classroom needs to be equipped with a computer and a projector.
- The timings given are approximate. Based on these figures, and a class of ten learners, the teaching time required is approximately 13 hours. This is made up of 9 hours in the classroom, and just over 4 hours monitoring pronunciation (10 students x 5 minutes x 5 meetings). The learning time is approximately 20 hours, of which 9 hours are spent in the classroom, 9 hours in self-access, and approximately half an hour having pronunciation monitored.

Classroom work

To use *Streaming Speech* in the classroom, you need a computer with soundcard and speakers, a microphone, and a projector so that all students can see the contents of the screen. You will also need a copy of the Student's Book, and this Teacher's Guide. Learners need a copy of the Student's Book each. The Student's Book has everything that the electronic publication has (plus a few extra pen-and-paper tasks), and in the classroom it makes it possible for all learners to participate in selecting answers, and doing the listening tasks. The book contains many features which enable learners to keep track of their progress – when they come back into the classroom after self-access work, they will have a record of the work they have done, a list of any questions they may want to ask, and a series of self-assessments.

Self-access

When working in the self-access centre, learners need headphones and a microphone. They should have a Student's Book with them, to record their answers on each task, and to record their self-assessments. Although they can do this on-screen, it is helpful for the monitoring process (see next section) that they write their answers and self-assessments in the book, to ensure that they don't forget anything they want to mention to you.

Monitoring Pronunciation

Although *Streaming Speech* contains many self-assessment exercises, and encourages independent learning, it is very important for you to monitor learners' progress, and to give feedback on their pronunciation at regular intervals. If your learners are advanced, independent learners then I suggest an allocation of three sessions of ten minutes per learner over the period of study and that learners attend the monitoring sessions in pairs or groups of three – though some shy ones may prefer to attend these sessions alone. In these monitoring sessions, learners need to bring their books with their records of work, and you will need access to the electronic publication. Specific advice on how to conduct these monitoring sessions is given in the teaching notes for each chapter.

Symbols

Streaming Speech uses a standard set of dictionary symbols – phoneme symbols – to give a written representation of speech sounds. The list of symbols is always available in a pop-up box available via the bottom right-hand side of the screen. Occasionally, I use phoneme symbols to help describe the changes that happen to dictionary pronunciations of words in normal speech.

Notation

Streaming Speech uses another set of symbols to represent the patterns of the stream of speech. These symbols are introduced gradually, as necessary, as we progressively work in pursuit of the goals and are summarised in a pop-up box that is accessible via a button at the bottom left-hand side of the screen.

Speech units

Throughout *Streaming Speech*, speech is not presented in sentences or grammatical units, it is presented in speech units. Speech units are patterns in the flow of the stream of speech, and it is part of the syllabus of *Streaming Speech* to introduce as much knowledge of speech units as is necessary to help achieve the listening and speaking goals. Thus the opening words of the first extract in Chapter 1, in 'correct' written English would be printed as 'While I was at university, I was very involved with the students' arts society, which was called 'The Arts Umbrella'.' In *Streaming Speech* it is presented in six lines, each containing a speech unit:

001 // while i was at university//
002 // i was very involved //
003 // with the //
004// students //
005 // arts society //
006 // which was called the arts umbrella //

The first and last speech units contain clauses but the middle four do not have a clause each, in fact the main clause is spread over the four units. The reasons for this are not anything you can tell from simply looking at the words on the page – you have to hear the way the speaker said them. When you hear them you will notice that in 002, 003, and 004 there are level tones on the words 'involved' 'the' and 'students' and because one of the rules of this type of presentation is that there can only be one tone per speech unit, a new line is started as soon as each tone is finished.

Speech unit analysis provides a window on speech, it reveals the patterns of speech and provides a very useful set of units to use for presenting speech to learners. But it is no substitute for the original recording – that is why, wherever practical, the original recording is linked to the speech unit so that when you click on a speech unit, you hear it.

Deciding where pauses, tones and prominences (stresses) are is often a matter of opinion. However in *Streaming Speech* the presentation follows an honourable, and well-established, tradition in English Language Teaching, that of Discourse Intonation, started by David Brazil (1925-1995). The ability to analyse speech into speech units is one that can be learned, and Chapter 10 provides training for those who want to adopt some of the techniques and concepts of *Streaming Speech* to other recordings.

International English

By presenting native-speaker models, and using native-speaker recordings in *Streaming Speech*, I am not suggesting that the native speaker models should be the targets to be emulated – that learners should aim to speak exactly like one of the speakers, and that only this level of accomplishment would constitute success. On the contrary, the speaker models are offered as samples of expert speaker – not native speaker behaviour. Their spontaneous speech contains useful, learnable, features of expert speaker behaviour that are rarely (if at all) taught: such as – varying rhythm, varying speed, buying planning time. *Streaming Speech* offers examples of expert-speaker behaviour that would be seen in recordings of non-native, just as much as native speakers.

Accuracy and Fluency

When we look closely at spontaneous speech, we see that it does not obey textbook rules: the speaker's concern is to communicate effectively at the moment, and in the context of speaking. For example they often pause in places that are not grammatical boundaries, they often drop sounds from the beginning and ends of words, they ask yes/no questions with falling intonation (and don't sound rude), they don't stress the last important word in a 'sentence' (and it doesn't sound wrong). *Streaming Speech* is liberating because it shows that many textbooks rules don't apply to spontaneous speech. Learners therefore do not have to bear these rules in mind when deciding whether to speak, and what to say.

Accuracy – less rigid standards

Streaming Speech shows that expert speakers communicate using less rigid standards of accuracy from those usually applied in pronunciation exercises in the classroom. For example, expert speakers usually simplify consonant clusters in the stream of speech: thus contact /kɒntækt/ loses its final /t/ and becomes /kɒntæk/ in 'he'd never had much contact with Brazilians', and

asked /ɑːskt/ loses the entire final cluster and becomes a /ɑːs/ in 'he asked me to go and run the farm' (both examples are taken from Chapter 8). If expert speakers can get away with lower standards of accuracy in their speech, then advanced learners can also get away with it. But it is important that the move away from rigid correctness with individual speech sounds must be accompanied by a natural flow that moves steadily in real-time – and it is training in this natural flow that *Streaming Speech* provides.

Accuracy within fluency

Streaming Speech is designed for upper-intermediate to advanced learners who have already done a lot of work in pronunciation. I expect the learners who use *Streaming Speech* to have had sufficient instruction in articulation: where to place the tongue in relation to the teeth, etc.

Streaming Speech aims to promote the ability to produce speech in a fluent flow, within which the learner produces individual sounds with sufficient accuracy. Accuracy work begins with a reminder of the relationship between sound and dictionary symbols (Chapters 1-8, section 4.1-3), and thereafter the sounds are practiced in speech-units (units of the stream of speech) taken from the original recordings of spontaneous speech. The goal is to improve accuracy whilst giving them an additional task - producing sounds on time in a natural flow of speech. There is no specific instruction in articulation (i.e. no instructions such as 'place your tongue behind your teeth') but there is instruction (Chapters 1-6, 4.4) in how to move from a slow version to a natural version of sample speech units. When you monitor progress in pronunciation in tutorial or in the classroom, it may be appropriate to give instruction in articulation.

Finally

Good luck with using *Streaming Speech*. Keep an eye on the webpages at www.speechinaction.com for resources, and if you have any successes or problems that you would like to share with me, then email me at richard@speechinaction.com