wider issues such as staying safe online for classes with younger students.

*Interaction Online* is a more specialised resource, which focuses on extending the use of technology outside the classroom with a range of blended learning activities. The main emphasis is on how to get the most out of online forums. The idea behind the activities is that they can be used on any platform where written interaction online takes place; they deliberately do not limit themselves to a single platform as things have a tendency to evolve. Having said that, within my current context, I personally pictured all the activities as taking place on a Moodle forum although they would work equally well in other contexts. The book is meant for general English teachers but EAP teachers will also find it useful. There is a good section on setting up and managing online interaction. This would be really beneficial to teachers new to blended learning who want to get an understanding of how this type of teaching can be made interactive. A particular benefit I have found is that it enables shy students who struggle to participate in a classroom lesson to find their voice as they have more time to formulate their ideas and are not constrained by more confident students dominating the conversation.

As well as general principles, there are sections on setting up specific types of interaction – personal, factual, creative, critical and fanciful – with suggested forum activities that can be done with each. It also contains invaluable sections on feedback and assessment, and task design. One of the activities my group really enjoyed was one in which they created their own memes – a really good way to get them to engage with topics that they might otherwise find inaccessible or uninteresting. It also showed them how easily false ideas can be spread around the internet, making it a good introduction to critical thinking and engagement with sources. Despite the many ideas, this is not a how-to manual. It will not tell you how to create a meme and, unlike *ETpedia Technology*, does not really suggest specific apps or websites – you'll have to Google them yourself (it is actually fairly straightforward). It offers

suggestions which would need to be followed up elsewhere, but if you have the confidence and skills, there is a lot here to enhance your teaching online. One of the advantages of this print/online bundle is a link to an e-source, so you only need to cut and paste instead of having to type out forums and activities.

Each of these books has something to offer teachers at different stages of their technological journey. If you are looking for a recipe book full of different ideas, websites and apps, then *ETpedia Technology* is for you. If you are a more confident user who wishes to improve their teaching in a blended situation, then *Interaction Online* could be of more interest.

Personally, I think both books would make a good addition to staffroom shelves.
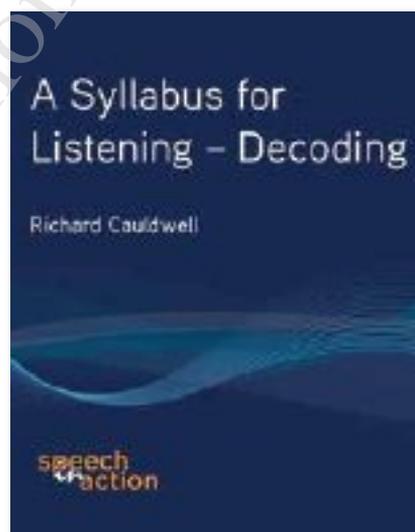
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# A Syllabus for Listening – Decoding

Richard Cauldwell
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See page 88 for details



*A Syllabus for Listening – Decoding* is a companion volume to *Phonology for Listening* (Cauldwell, 2014), a book

which has been widely acknowledged as transformational in its treatment of listening. *A Syllabus for Listening* expands on the main premise of the first book that teaching listening needs to take a full account of the sound structure of spontaneous speech. It supplies more detail of the factors that make authentic oral production such a difficult barrier to successful second-language listening and provides a framework and activities for activating a spontaneous-speech approach in the classroom.

Part 1 introduces the basic concepts and metalanguage used in the book. The *decoding* in the title of the book is explained as the process of separating out speech sounds and attaching meaning to them. This task is complicated by the fact that speech comes to us in a rush where word boundaries are not respected and sounds change in the pressure of real-time interaction. Richard draws a fundamental difference between the 'sight substance', what is written and read, and the 'sound substance', what we say and hear. These are two very different media, but teaching has represented the sound substance as basically equivalent to the sight substance, with the result that decoding has been neglected as a competence that can be developed in learners. The belief that you get better at listening just by exposure alone, probably modelled on the benefits of extended reading, persists despite all the evidence to the contrary.

Reasons for this head-in-the-sand approach are provided in Part 2, a critique of training, theory and practice. Teacher training tends to perpetuate pedagogically convenient models of teaching listening which are at best half-truths. The standard listening lesson follows what John Field (2009) has called a comprehension approach. The teacher has a long context-setting stage; the recording is played once for a gist question and then again for detailed understanding; the language of the text is exploited and/or there is a skills exercise, typically a discussion activity. This leaves no time for decoding and it strongly resembles a reading lesson.

Richard, based on his own classroom experience, makes an excellent point that we are governed by 'the smiling class imperative', whereby we want to keep the learners/customers happy at the expense of teaching them something actually useful. Decoding is not as intrinsically interesting as running around the classroom doing a *Find somebody who …* exercise so it is dropped.

What we are subjecting learners to is what Richard calls a careful speech model that blinds learners to the realities of spontaneous speech. The central metaphor in the book is that of the Greenhouse, Garden and Jungle, a cline from citation forms to rule-driven connected speech to basically 'What on earth was that?!' In the Greenhouse each word is pronounced separately with the sounds carefully and fully articulated so that they are like plants kept in separate pots, easy to identify and tend. Out in the garden, word endings change or converge, thus *did it* is pronounced as one unit, but such phenomena are predictable and rule-governed, pleasantly arranged like flower beds. In the jungle, words often become almost unrecognisable as they are twisted out of shape or even disappear. For example, two whole consonants in *did it* are lost resulting in *dii*. Richard's issue is that listeners spend too much time in the greenhouse and not enough in the jungle. A greenhouse approach

is fine, even advisable, for teaching pronunciation, where the goal is clarity, but to become better listeners it is necessary to venture out into the jungle.

The laws of the jungle are given in Part 3, the heart of the book as it sets out a syllabus for listening. Most teachers will associate a syllabus with a list, particularly a list of grammatical items. So what does a syllabus of listening list? Not words. Part 3 begins with a very convincing argument as to why single words are unsuitable as items of analysis. Words are pronounced in different ways in different contexts by different speakers and the result is just too many sound shapes for second language learners to cope with. Richard illustrates with six different versions of *(be) able (to)*. Instead, the syllabus consists of word clusters, often referred to as lexical chunks, or prefabricated phrases in the ELT literature, and streamlining processes whereby words are prosodically reshaped in real time. The significance of word clusters, defined as reoccurring sequences of two to six words, for example *you know* and *do you know what I mean*, is that the process of decoding them trains listeners to be sensitive to connected speech. Word clusters contain a large proportion of function words, underlined in *do you know what I mean*, which listeners have traditionally been taught to ignore. However, breaking down word clusters and recognising how the internal sound shape has been moulded is critical to listening competence. Streamlining covers a wide range of connected speech phenomena, for example the delightfully named *d'eth drop* (p110), the discarding of that most English of sounds ð, as in *the* and *this*. Streamlining is the norm in the jungle and listeners need to experience it as a combination of processes which can distort an utterance beyond comfortable recognition.

Part 4 is the practical section of the book in that it provides ideas, tools and activities to teach listening in the direction proposed. There is a wealth of material here and it is varied enough to suit classrooms of

any ilk, both technology-free and technology-rich. Three that caught my eye were the botanic walk, earworms and YouGlish. The botanic walk is a TPR activity where the teacher puts pictures of a greenhouse, garden and jungle on different walls and moves between them to illustrate the different pronunciations of the same unit. Earworms utilises those catchy snatches of lyrics you can't get out of your head by having students repeat and memorise them in almost mantric fashion. YouGlish is a free platform where you can get multiple sound shapes of the same unit: 54,000 renditions of that cluster *be able to* in US English alone (p213). Many of these activities would also be transferable to pronunciation teaching, but they are set up as bespoke listening tasks.

It is a cliché in reviews to round up with a 'This book is essential reading for …'. However, this is absolutely true when it comes to *A Syllabus for Listening*. Anyone involved in ELT needs to read this book and change their practice, whether that's somebody teaching an evening course at a language school or a textbook writer integrating listening into their material. With its firm anchoring in theory, wealth of real-world examples and classroom activities, there can be absolutely no excuse to ignore its contents. We can make learners better listeners, hence massively improving their effectiveness as communicators as well as their success in high-stakes situations such as examinations, but this can only happen if we teach listening differently. *A Syllabus for Listening* shows the way forward and provides a more than helping hand on this journey.

### References

Cauldwell R (2014) *Phonology for Listening: Teaching the Stream of Speech*. Speech in Action.

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