

Making & Using Unrehearsed Tapes

Presented by Ruth Sasaki

Reviewed by Warrick Liang

Anyone who has taught listening comprehension has probably encountered two major problems: (1) finding taped materials that are both meaningful to the students and appropriate to their level of English ability, and (2) figuring out activities that enable the students to work with that material in a way that improves their listening comprehension. Ruth Sasaki's presentation offered innovative solutions to these two problems.

The materials presented were unrehearsed tapes made by the instructor and her colleagues. Any teacher, yes, even you, could make his or her own tape. The procedure for making the tape will be explained later. First, let's look at the rationale behind Ms. Sasaki's method (with a small "m"), then at the procedure for using the tape in the classroom, and finally at the procedure for making the tape.

RATIONALE

Four ideas were proposed by Ms. Sasaki: (1) Language should be studied in context. This is especially important in listening comprehension. (2) Students should be encouraged to listen for meaning; that is, they should focus on the ideas and information rather than the language. (3) Alternate ways of expressing the same information should be encouraged. Students who paraphrase tapes with words quite different from those on the tape will have comprehended and processed the information in a way that makes sense to them. (4) The method presented simulates the process that students must go through outside the classroom. First, they must understand. Then, knowing the situation and the objectives, they must figure out how to express themselves in order to obtain/give the desired/known information.

USING THE TAPE IN THE CLASSROOM

First, a thirty-second to one-minute tape is played. In small groups, the students discuss what they heard. Alone, a student may understand 15% of the content, but together, the group may understand 50%. Then the students are given chalk and told to write on the board any bits of information they heard. Uncertain items should be included, as they can be checked in later listenings. Since the focus is on listening for information rather than grammar or writing, students should be discouraged from writing complete sentences. Key words jotted down in note form will suffice, and classroom time need not be spent correcting written errors. Each group should have a section of the board to write on. (Large sheets of scratch paper and marking pens can be used instead of a blackboard and chalk.) Emphasis should be kept on oral communication and not on note-taking.

The tape should be played again, and a third time if necessary, until the students have come up with the important information. After each listening, allow the students to continue their discussion and note-taking process. When the content of the tape has been sufficiently reconstructed, divide the class into pairs and have them role-play the same situation. One set of notes should be on the board to relieve students of the burden of remembering specific information. Have them role-play twice, changing roles the second time.

Throughout the above steps, the students should be encouraged to work together. They will gather much more information if they share what they hear with each other. The teacher can go from group to group providing assistance where necessary -- for example, giving feedback on errors, pointing out degrees

of politeness, etc. Whether students are taking notes or role-playing, they will often produce the information on the tape with words that are quite different from those on the tape. When this happens, remember not to interfere by urging them to use words identical to those on the tape.

After the students have practiced role-playing in pairs, have them take turns role-playing in front of the entire class with different partners. Each person will use different language to express the same information, so changing partners discourages memorization or falling into established patterns. The students will pick up more details and alternative ways of expression as they listen to each others' role-plays.

The final step is to play the tape again. At this point students will often focus on specific expressions or idioms which they needed while role-playing. Allow them to focus on these missed items and help them where necessary, but all the time make it clear that the expressions they used in place of the actual words on the tape are in no way incorrect or less valid unless, of course, inappropriate language is used. Time permitting, additional role-playing can be done after the tape has been replayed.

The entire procedure outlined above can take anywhere from one to one and a half hours. In that time, the students are basically given a tape and a way to work together to understand the tape. The instructor seldom, if ever, provides "answers", but instead provides students with the opportunity to listen and learn from each other. At the beginning of the procedure, the class may understand but a small fraction of the tape. By the end of the activity, they will often have grasped virtually all the material on the tape. And they will have accomplished this by themselves -- without having the speech reproduced at slower speeds, and with little help from the instructor.

MAKING THE TAPE

The tape itself is a story which the instructor creates and unfolds in accordance with the way the class itself is developing. The level of difficulty and the content itself can be geared to the interests and needs of each particular class. For example, if the students in your class are businessmen planning to go abroad, a story revolving around the experiences of a businessman living abroad would be ideal. The story itself can be as comical or as serious as the particular class.

After forming an idea of the basic content of the story, begin the first tape with a definite setting in mind. Define the basic identity of the characters, and decide what specific information will be conveyed in "episode one". Before recording, decide when and how episode one will end. Then, without writing any script, begin recording by ad-libbing. Speak naturally without slowing down. Allow mistakes, aborted sentences, interruptions and overlapping dialogue to go on the tape. All these aspects are a part of language that students will have to deal with outside of the classroom in real communication.

The length of each episode should be short -- about thirty seconds to a minute. Anything longer will involve too much memory recall and will be too unmanageable.

Each episode should contain some concrete information -- the lower the class level, the more concrete. Each episode should also contain definite semantic concepts (e.g., duration, point of time, sequence, location, quantity, etc.), and definite functions (e.g., requesting, inviting, refusing, apologizing, agreeing, disagreeing, etc.).

In addition to making an episode easier to comprehend by including more concrete information, you can include more repetition of the same information.

If the class can get about 90% of the information in any episode after two or three listenings, then the level is appropriate. If they can't get most of the information in four listenings, make the tape easier by simplifying the content, reducing the quantity of information, providing more repetition and paraphrase. Do not make it easier by slowing down the speed of speech.

Each episode should build on previous episodes in terms of both plot and character development. If possible, use names and personalities of students in the tapes. Tying the tapes together with a theme is important in that it provides a context within which the students can listen. It also encourages them to focus on content rather than sounds. It keeps the students interested and motivated, and often helps to create a friendly atmosphere of common experience among the class members.

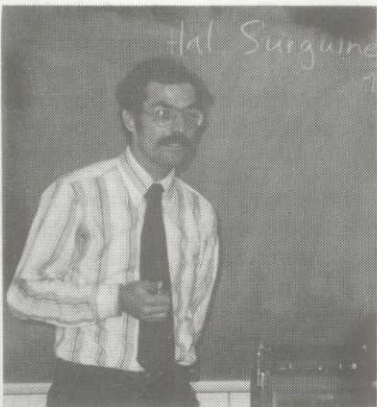
At the end of Ms. Sasaki's presentation some members of the audience said they felt the sample tapes which she has played contained unlikely situations or unlikely topic changes. Ms. Sasaki pointed out that she was merely presenting an idea, and that members of the audience could make their own tapes as accurate or realistic as they felt necessary.

Ms. Sasaki's presentation was well-received by the audience. I personally found her ideas to be very workable and enlightening, and have had much success using her method in my classroom.

Using Radio Commercials

Presented by Harold Surguine

Reviewed by Steven Tripp



Mr. Surguine's presentation has already been well described by himself in his article (with Johnnie Johnson Hafernik) in the September 1979 issue of the *TESOL QUARTERLY*, so I will limit this to his main points and add a few comments.

As a supplement in ESL listening classes radio commercials are recommended for seven reasons:

- 1) close correspondences to everyday spoken English
- 2) sound clarity
- 3) length
- 4) redundancy
- 5) adaptability to multi-level classes
- 6) general entertainment
- 7) their representation of mainstream American culture

Let me discuss the points in order. The first refers to the naturalness of the language. Mr. Surguine says that at first students are awed by the speed of the language, but that actually speakers in commercials don't talk faster than normal. I don't know if he has checked this, but I have timed unrehearsed English that is as fast as 14 phonemes per second. I have never measured any rehearsed language that is faster so it's probably true. At any rate, mastery of English includes the ability to understand English at broadcast speed, so even if it were faster, it wouldn't matter. Whether the English of commercials is representative of everyday spoken English is another story. The phrase, "Take only as directed" doesn't occur very often in my everyday speech. However,