PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SELECTION AND USE OF TAPED MATERIALS

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Teachers of English as a Foreign Language and others concerned with the organization of EFL learning are often faced with the problem of choosing material for their students. Some teachers receive huge quantities of publicity material while others may find it difficult to get any information about what is available. Some are free to spend vast sums of money buying whatever they fancy, other are working within very tight budgets and are expected to buy material which will last for many years and cater for a number of groups of students. We hope that this article will help all would-be purchasers and users of EFL material to make a more informed choice within the limitations imposed on them by their particular circumstances.

The article deals with the selection and use of taped material for 3 areas of work:
(A) pronunciation
(B) drills
(C) listening

A. PRONUNCIATION

In recent years, an increasing amount of taped material specifically designed for pronunciation practice has appeared on the market, and teachers are faced with the problem of selecting from this quantity of material those tapes which are best suited to their own situation and the specific needs of the learners for whom they are responsible. The criteria suggested below cover the following broad areas:
1. Skills practised - receptive and/or productive
2. Choice of linguistic items
3. Language level
4. Meaningful v. meaningless practice
5. Cost, style and speed of the recordings.

These criteria are intended as a general guide for the teacher in selecting materials; the sequence in which they are presented does not indicate any favoured order of priorities, and it is left to the individual teacher to assess the relative importance of each of the criteria in the light of their own teaching situation.

1. Skills

It is generally accepted that there are two stages in learning how to pronounce a language: first, a receptive or listening stage in which we learn to discriminate the sounds and patterns which are significant in that language, and secondly a productive or speaking stage in which we learn to produce what we have already learned to discriminate auditorily. Although in a sense these stages are chronological, with listening coming before speaking, they are also simultaneous, in the sense that there is a continuous process of correction and improvement as the learner is exposed to further models for listening. So the teacher will need to ask herself: does the material provide practice in both the receptive and the productive skills? It may be a useful exercise at this point for the teacher to analyse and describe in chronological order the procedures through which the student has to work in order to complete a unit of the course. This should make it possible to assess the balance between the two skills. If practice in one of the skills is minimal, it does not necessarily mean that the material must be rejected; other material may well be found to fill the gap. On the whole, it is the receptive skill which seems to be neglected, so any material which provides some form of ear-training should be looked at with special attention.

2. Linguistic items

Most published materials concentrate on one area of pronunciation: intonation, rhythm, stress, weak forms of words, word-linking, individual sounds, and so on. Very few courses try to cover everything. It is therefore extremely important for the teacher to find out precisely what problems the students have. The time available for pronunciation practice is usually very limited, so it is vital not to waste time on items with which the students have no difficulty. Most courses are comprehensive and methodical, in that they deal exhaustively with all the possible problems within the chosen area; this means that even after deciding on a course, the teacher will find it necessary to use exercises from it selectively, excluding those which deal with non-problems.

3. Language level

An important consideration is whether the content of the material, and in particular the choice of structural and lexical items, is within the capabilities of the student. As a general rule, the items should already be familiar, since the purpose of pronunciation courses is not to teach new vocabulary or structures, and the inclusion of a mass of unfamiliar items is frustrating and discouraging, and also obscures and distracts attention from the point of the practice. If it is necessary to teach the occasional new word or structure then of course the material

need not be rejected; but if the language level is very much higher than that of the students, then using it would almost certainly be counter-productive. Conversely, if the content of the excercises is restricted to a very limited number of items long familiar to the students, boredom will set in, and the results will be equally disastrous.

4. Meaningful v. meaningless practice

The influence of behaviourism on language teaching methodology resulted in a strong emphasis on mechanical competence, sometimes (or perhaps often) at the expense of meaning, and there is still a considerable amount of pronunciation practice material available which is virtually meaningless. The use of nonsense words is hard to justify, and isolated genuine words are also of dubious value. Conditioning may be a part of the learning process, but there is no doubt that contextualised material is easier to assimilate than material which is not. So the teacher should also consider what assumptions the material makes about how learning takes place, and whether the practice is meaningful or meaningless. There are, of course, degrees of meaningfulness, and material which is not particularly meaningful may not be entirely useless; it may, for example, be used in very small 'doses' for intensive practice of an individual student's problem, or it could be basis for a game which would then provide a sort of super-imposed context. Finally, even if the material is contextualised and meaningful, it is also important that the contexts should be ones that will be understood by, and of interest to, the students.

5. Practical consideration

There are a number of purely practical criteria relating to the cost of the materials and the style, speed and quality of the recording. Firstly, in addition to the price of the tape or tapes, it may also be necessary to consider whether it is essential for students to have a copy of the accompanying book, if there is one. Then, too, it is particularly important in the case of pronunciation materials that the recordings should be made by native speakers, who should talk at normal speed. Speech which is unnaturally slow will inevitably be distorted; strong forms will replace weak ones, contractions and elisions will disappear, the normal rhythm of the utterance will be changed, and the tape will not provide a model of fluent speech for the learner. Although it is arguable that native pronunciation can never be a realistic target for the foreign learner, nevertheless it should always be the model for listening. It may be felt that it is too difficult for learners in the early stages to cope with native speech at normal speed, but provided the lexis and structures are familiar, the utterances are fairly short, and adequate time is allowed for the student responses, there will not generally be any great problem. This leads on to a further point: too

little time for the student response results in tension and frustration, while too much time leads to loss of concentration and soon to boredom. A pause roughly one and a half times that needed by a native speaker will usually be about right, though elementary students may need a little longer, and advanced ones can often manage with slightly less. Lastly, if instructions and/or examples are not clearly presented, the students may not be sure what they are expected to do, and again they will feel tense and frustrated, and the time spent on the practice may well be wasted.

Adapting other recorded material

The criteria discussed above relate mainly to the problems of evaluating taped materials specifically designed for pronunciation practice. Teachers often feel, however, that using such materials isolates pronunciation work from the mainstream of language learning, and increasingly, teachers are looking for ways of integrating pronunciation practice with practice in other skills. One way of doing this is to build exercises based on materials designed for other purposes. This technique is illustrated in the following example, in which a section of a dialogue designed to give practice in listening comprehension and the use of colloquial English in realistic situations, is adapted to provide ear-training which develops the learner's awareness of the implications of various intonation patterns. The extract is from Realistic English Book 3 by Abbs, Cook and Underwood, and the type of exercise is based on Active Intonation by V J Cook.

Listen to the dialogue and answer the questions.

Mr Evans They're all the same, these politicians.

Does Mr Evans approve of politicians, or is he suspicious of them?

(Pause)

He's suspicious of them.

Giles I think he was to emphasize the idea of planning - economic planning, I mean.

Mr Evans Goodness knows where you get your ideas from, my boy.

Does Mr Evans approve of Giles' ideas, or does he disapprove?

(Pause)

He disapproves.

Christopher No, he's right, Mr Evans. You can't have a high standard of living without economic planning.

Mr Evans Well, of course the economy's got to be strong, but government planning won't make it strong.

Does Mr Evans sound critical, or cold and reserved?

(Pause)

He sounds critical.

Giles Oh!

Mr Evans Planning is killing free enterprise.

Christopher Free enterprise!

Does Christopher approve or disapprove of free enterprise?

(Pause)

He disapproves.

Mr Evans You need to give free enterprise plenty of incentives. Competition in a free market - that's the thing!

Giles There is such a thing as a social conscience, you know. In a free market, you have a free-for-all and it's the poor who suffer.

Mr Evans Rubbish! The Welfare State takes care of them, and it's my money that pays for the Welfare State ...

Is Mr. Evans indignant, or does he sound friendly?

(Pause)

He's indignant.

Christopher Yes, but don't you see -

Mr Evans Do you know how much I have to pay in taxes? There isn't any point in working these days. It's natural for people to want higher wages.

Giles I think your point of view is not only materialistic, it's selfish.

Mr Evans It's not; it's common sense.

Mrs Evans I've made some nice fresh coffee.

Does Mrs Evans sound cold and reserved, or does she sound friendly and soothing?

(Pause)

She sounds friendly and soothing.

The original tape can be modified by copying it and inserting spoken questions and answers at the appropriate points, or more simply, the student can be provided with a worksheet containing the questions, the answers to which may be discussed afterwards, providing this does not infringe copyright. Many recorded dialogues are suitable for using as the basis of a hunting exercise, in which the student is required to pick out examples of eg weak forms of auxiliary verbs, intonation patterns denoting a specified attitude, one particular sound, special stress, and so on. The following dialogue, from Realistic English Unit Seven, contains six examples of linking 'r's; the first one is marked in the text, and the student may be asked to listen carefully to the tape and identify the other five, and then to go on and practice them in the exploded version of the dialogue. The advantage of this type of exercise is that there is no need to modify the original recording.

Section One

Christopher It's really quite impossible!

Mrs Evans What is, Christopher?

Christopher Trying to live on my grant.

Mrs Evans You'll have to cut down on your expenses! That car of yours is unnecessary, for a start.

Christopher No, it isn't; I need a car.

Mrs Evans You really ought to use your feet a bit more. It's people like you who make the roads so dangerous

Caroline That's not fair, Aunt Margaret. Chris's car is splendid!

Mrs Evans	I never had a car when I was your age, young lady. Young people nowadays expect too much.
Christopher	You're not being very helpful. I need money!
Mrs Evans	Well, sell the car, then.
Christopher	No, no, a thousand times no!
Mrs Evans	Then why don't you get a job?
Christopher	Now, that is a good idea!

Drills, too, will often provide useful practice in the productive skill, since the student responses generally involve the repetition several times over not only of a structure, but also of an intonation pattern, so pre-lab. preparation for structure drills should also draw attention to features of pronunciation which the student might otherwise not notice.

In this drill from Realistic English Unit One, the ostensible point of the practice is the regular form of the simple past in which the ending '-ed' is pronounced /t/. However, the response uses an intonation pattern consisting of a rise followed by a high fall, a tune which is commonly associated with protest and complaint. This attitude is well contextualised by this drill, and the tune is used consistently throughout, so, providing the student is aware of the implication of the tune, the drill provides an additional bonus of extra intonation practice.

Drill 12

Finish your work now.
But I finished it yesterday.

Wash your hair now.
But I washed it yesterday.

Fetch the paper now.
But I fetched it yesterday.

Conclusion

The movement today is towards the use of more and more authentic material, and it seems likely the writers of pronunciation materials will follow suit. It would be a natural and logical development for such material to be integrated increasingly with other language practice, and it is to be hoped that this will happen. In the meantime, there is much

that individual teachers can do to modify and adapt other recorded materials, without involving themselves in a heavy burden of extra work.

B. DRILLS

In many cases, drills are the mainstay of language laboratory work. The reasons for this are both theoretical and practical. Language labs are, after all, most heavily indebted to the theoretical contraints of structuralism and all its ramifications. These include the assumptions of behaviourist rather than of cognitive theories of learning; the idea that language learning is separable into the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing; and the use of imitation as a desirable student activity. And in practical terms, drills do tend to play a significant role in the taped sections of any well-known EFL course - even contemporary, functional courses.

This is not to say that drills need be boring, mechanical and demotivating. Any EFL teacher knows that drills can be all of these things. But if that is the case, the teacher should try to appreciate why the drills are boring; why they are demotivating. If the teacher (and the student) can find this out, then it becomes possible to distinguish between good drills and bad drills. It is much better to be able to make such distinctions, rather than simply be able to say that all drills are boring and mechanical.

The following list of components and variables of drills is designed to help the teacher, and in some cases the student too, to decide whether a particular drill or set of drills is useful in any particular situation. It is well known that some teachers are fanatically committed to drills, but that others want to throw all drills out of the window. The following analysis is intended to give these two groups of teachers some common ground for useful discussion.

The analysis of the components and variables of drills will refer to a sample drill, taken from Book 1 Unit 1 of Realistic English (B Abbs, V Cook, M Underwood, OUP London 1967). The authors of this article would like to thank the authors of Realistic English for giving their permission to quote from the course, and for allowing us to select from the whole range of drills within the course just one for comment and analysis. The intention here is merely to provide real, extant examples of the different components of EFL drills. Realistic English includes a great variety of drill material, and it is a rich source for those teacher trainers, teachers and students who are interested in the study of drill typology. The nine components dealt with in this analysis are:

1. Instructions
2. Exemplification
3. Phasing
4. Performance
5. Stimulus
6. Response
7. Item Relationship
8. Sequencing
9. Language Learning Skills

Note: M = man
W = woman

(SAMPLE DRILL)

Drill 3 M Now here are some questions about numbers.

Listen first please.

M What's two and two?
W Two and two are four!

M What's six and three?
W Six and three are nine!

M What's four and five?
W Four and five are nine!

Now you can answer the questions. Are you ready?

M What's five and seven?
Gap
W Five and seven are twelve!

M What's six and eight?
Gap
W Six and eight are fourteen!

M What's eleven and twelve?
Gap
W Eleven and twelve are twenty-three!

M What's four and seventeen?
Gap
W Four and seventeen are twenty-one!

M What's fifteen and fourteen?
Gap
W Fifteen and fourteen are twenty-nine!

M What's nine and three?
Gap
W Nine and three are twelve!

(14 + 24) (30 + 40) (40 + 50) (20 + 40)

1. Instructions

The instructions in any drill can be varied in at least five ways:

1.1 there may or may not be any instructions

1.2 the instructions may prove to be clear or unclear to the students

1.3 the instructions may or may not explain the point of the drill

1.4 the explanation may be 'technical' or 'not technical', in that it may or may not use grammatical or linguistic or phonological terminology

1.5 the instructions may be given at different points in the drill: nearly always at the beginning, sometimes after the example items, and sometimes during the drill itself (eg towards the end of the drill) or at the end (eg 'That is the end of Drill No. 3').

In our sample drill, there are instructions; they are clear; they explain the point about numbers, and this explanation is not technical, in the sense that the explanation does not involve itself with other relevant issues - for example, the use of the present simple being practised in the drill. The instructions are given at the beginning of drill, after the examples, but in no other place.

Naturally, teachers and students have different opinions about the form and function of instructions. In evaluating instructions, several factors are involved: the sophistication of the students' knowledge of grammar, for example, or the relative difficulty of the drill, or the extent to which the students have been prepared for a particular drill.

Even so, it should go without saying that instructions are best when they are given clearly, explicitly, and at different points in the drill. In the case of a long drill, for example, it is very useful to number the drill items, to tell the students how many items there are, and to remind them towards the end of the drill that there are only two or three more items to do. In this way, students have an idea of how long the drill is going to be. Alternatively, the teacher can decide to severely edit long drills: eight or nine items in one drill may be about as much as your students want to take.

2. Exemplification

Nearly all drills provide examples for the students to listen to. The examples vary according to

2.1 their number

2.2 their possible reappearance as the first items in the drill proper

2.3 their reliability

In the same drill, there are three examples. They appear only as examples, and they are not repeated as the first three items in the drill proper. The examples give clear, correct illustrations of what is coming in the drill, therefore they are reliable.

If students are well prepared for drill work, or if the work is easy for them, then two examples before the drill proper should be enough. If the students are not well prepared, or if the material seems to be difficult, then three examples might be more useful. And whether the drill gives two or three examples, it is often very encouraging for the student to have the examples repeated as the first two or three items in the drill proper. This gives the students confidence, since they have heard the correct responses already. Entirely 'new' material in the first item of the drill proper can, in some cases, delay the student's responses unnecessarily. And whether the examples reappear in the drill proper or not, they should be reliable: that is, they should illustrate the point of the drill, and the drill proper should not set off in a direction not signposted by the examples. Regretlably, some examples in some drills are not reliable. For instance: if the examples give:

Stimulus: Michael likes bread. John likes bread.

Response: Both Michael and John like bread.

then the student does not want to be faced with a drill item that, in its 'correct' taped response, reverses the order of 'Michael' and 'John'.

But this sort of reversal and alteration does occur, and unless the students are somehow prepared for such changes, they find them unsettling.

3. Phasing

Drills may be either

3.1 two phase: tape stimulus + student response

3.2 three phase: tape stimulus + student response + tape reinforcement of the correct response

3.3 four phase: tape stimulus + student's first response + tape giving the correct response + student's second, and this time fully correct response.

In the same drill, the items are three phase. In each item, the tape gives the correct response.

The phasing component of a drill can prove to be the drill's most positive or most negative feature. If the material is too easy for the students, then four phase or even three phase material can waste a lot of time. On the other hand, if the material seems to be rather difficult for students, then two phase and especially three phase material can be extremely frustrating, because students feel rushed and harrassed by the tape. Usually, two phase work is best suited to listen and repeat exercises of a fairly straightforward nature. Three phase work is desirable when the students feel that the level of difficulty is just right for them. Four phase work is appropriate in those cases where the students feel that the material is both challenging and interesting. There is no doubt that there is some three phase material that is too difficult for the student, and in these cases the drills can be counterproductive. Also, there is some four phase material that for some students represents little more than a waste of their time and energy. The teacher can be prepared for both eventualities: three phase material that should be four phase material for a particular group of students can be re-recorded by the teacher as four phase material. Conversely, four phase material can be edited into three phase work, or the students can be asked to look upon the fourth phase as an opportunity to repeat the answer twice more, or as a chance to practise their pronunciation and intonation.

4. Performance

The ways in which drills are actually performed are many and various, but the two main variables affect:

4.1 the speed at which the material is spoken

4.2 the degree of realism and naturalness with which the material is spoken.

In the same drill, both the speed and the sense of realism are typical of traditional EFL materials. Quite simply, this means that some people will find the speed of delivery too slow, some will find it just right, and some will find it too fast. On the question of realism, some people will find the delivery extremely unreal, others will find the performance acceptably realistic for teaching purposes, and some may find that the actors are extremely effective.

Assessing the performance element of any drill is extremely difficult. First, different people have different opinions about desirable speeds and about degrees of realism. Broadly speaking, a lot of native speakers of English tend to find EFL drill performances rather slow, and extremely stagey: drills are almost a separate variety of English - 'EFL drills English!' Non-native speakers on the other hand may not find the performances so offensive. The same drill can be regarded very differently by different people. In practice, it is often unreasonable of the native speaker to accuse the drills of being over performed, or of being hypercorrect middle class bourgeois English. Many foreign students do not think this, and they need the security of a slow, clear delivery, even though it is from some points of view unnatural. Also, actors who record EFL drills will point out that there is not much more they can do with the material they get. There is some sense in this argument: drills do not, after all, represent the highest achievements of the creative writer. Even so, there is a growing tendency for drills to include different voices, different accents (they are not genuine, even then: they are 'put on' by the same sorts of actors who do all the non-regional, RP drills), and different rates of delivery.

5. Stimulus

The stimuli used in any drill can take several forms:

5.1 they can be language or non-language (eg the noise made by a machine or an animal or a picture).

5.2 they can be real language or unreal language - though the distinction between the two is often a matter of opinion.

5.3 they can be constant - always the same sort of pattern - or variable - the clue in the stimulus can be disguised, or different in each item of the drill.

In the sample, the stimuli are linguistic, they are, taken in isolation, real language, and they are constant. In each case the linguistic form is interrogative; each of the stimulus questions make some sort of sense (admittedly, though, not a great deal, because one assumes that the students 'know' the answers already in their own language); and all of the stimuli occur in a regular, constant pattern.

Today, writers, teachers and students can afford to be much more demanding on this question of stimuli. First, there is no reason why the stimuli in any drill cannot be mixed: different voices, different ways of presenting the same problem to students; different grammatical constructions producing the same sort of response; more realistic and plausible contexts for each item; in short, there can be a good deal of variety in the presentation of stimuli. In the sample drill, the stimuli are proper and correct, but they are invariable. For a mathematically conscious group of students the stimuli could be as it were more 'difficult' - different voices posing more complex arithmetical problems, where the speakers are lecturing, or coughing, or stumbling over their words. Or, for mathematically unsophisticated students, the stimuli could be varied functionally; eg 'Oh, I've made a mistake adding up nineteen and twelve' or 'This bill is wrong. It says four, nine and six are twenty one!' In these cases, the student simply has to catch the numbers, and to respond with the correct arithmetic, as the sample drill.

6. Response

The response element in a drill can be varied in the same ways as the stimulus element:

6.1 it can require students to produce language, or to perform some less obviously 'linguistic' act, eg choose a picture, underline a word, or put two or three parts of a drawing together.

6.2 it can require students to produce language that is real or unreal: though, once again, the distinction is a matter of debate in many cases.

6.3 it can require students to produce a constant, or a variable sort of response.

In the sample, the responses are lingustic: students must say something, using numbers, and using the present simple in a particular sentence construction. The language required from students is real in the sense that it is English, but it is not very realistic in any sense other than the strictly pedagogic. Getting students to say "Two and two are four!' is certainly a justifiable goal: but the justification is in terms of pedagogic expediency, rather than in terms of usefulness in real life.

Finally, the responses throughout this drill require a constant form of response: always number A + and + number B + are + number C.

It is not possible to evaluate responses without consideration of the particular needs of particular teaching situations. The teacher might want to experiment with drills that require less obviously linguistic responses (eg filling in a chart, or drawing a diagram), but these sorts of drills require great organizational skills on everyone's part. Also, the teacher and students might want responses that are not simply pedagogically expedient - yet since the laboratory (and for that matter most classrooms) are somewhat artificial environments, the sorts of responses that are 'unreal' are in many cases unavoidable, and even desirable, especially if the students are the sort who will never be required to use English in the English speaking world. Finally, teachers might want the responses to be variable in some way: but this is extremely difficult to set up. Variable responses would have to be clued and cued by variable stimuli, and students will find themselves listening to too many things at once. Constant, invariable responses can often be demotivating, it is true. But this may be because the drills in question are either too easy or (and this is often the case) too long.

7. Item relationship

Drills consist of a certain number of items: that is, of a certain number of stimulus/response pairs. The relationships between the stimulus and the response of any item is variable:

7.1 it can tend to be arbitrary and meaningless, and/or non-arbitrary and meaningful.

7.2 it can involve degrees of repetition, and/or degrees of adaptation.

7.3 it can practise any specific linguistic point deliberately, and/or accidentally.

In the sample drill, the relationship between each stimulus and each response is partly arbitrary and meaningless, yet partly non-arbitrary and meaningful. The sort of exchange 'What's six and three? Six and three are nine!' is arbitrary and meaningless in the sense that the question is not a very likely one in the first place, and the answer to the question is 'Nine', and not 'Six and three are nine!' On the other hand, the item does pose a stimulus question, and does require a response answer: to that limited extent, the item is meaningful - at least a good deal more so than the sort of exchanges

'Oxford Street!' 'Let's go to Oxford Street!'

'Paris!' 'Let's go to Paris!'

where neither the stimuli, nor the responses, nor their relationships are of much interest to anybody.

The arbitrary, meaningless nature of the sample drill is partly a product of the other two variables in the item relationship. Students are required to repeat words in the stimulus, and the drill is about the specific linguistic point, the 'universal truth' use of the present simple tense. These two features exert great pressure on this drill, and they force a wholly unnatural, and classically drill-like relationship between each stimulus and each response in all the items. The most influential factor seems to be the deliberate desire to have a drill on the present tense. This deliberate desire forces students to use some form of the verb to be (in this case are), and in order to get the student to use this form of the verb, the drill has to make use of numbers - by convention the standard illustrative context for 'universal truths'.

Clearly, this question of item relationship is an extremely complex one. Anyone who has tried to write and record drills knows how difficult it is to establish stimulus/response relationships that are meaningful, interesting and challenging. Also, anyone who has taught a variety of drills to a variety of students knows that there are some students who actually thrive on meaningless, repetition orientated drills. Some students get a sense of confidence through such drills, and some teachers feel that such drills give both the teacher and students an opportunity to master the various skills needed in order to cope with language laboratory work at all.

In practice, though, it may be necessary for the teacher to be at least aware of item relationships in particular drills. If the students react negatively to meaningless repetition work on specific structural points, then the teacher has to be ready to do several things. The item relationships could be rewritten. The strictly repeating element in the students' workload could be replaced by an adapting element - where the student has to do something with the stimulus, rather than just repeat it. Also, the teacher could disguise the deliberate intention of the drill, by telling the students to concentrate on stress, rhythm and intonation - rather than telling them to concentrate on, for example, one of the meanings of the present continuous. If teachers have neither the time nor the skill to do any of these things, then he can share their doubts about the liveliness of the material with the students, and ask them to take the material for what it is: just practice.

8. Sequencing

The sequencing of the items in a drill affects:

8.1 the number of items

8.2 the extent to which the items are connected to each other

8.3 the extent to which the items are related to an accompanying text.

In the sample, there are thirteen items, including the three illustrative items at the beginning of the drill. The items are connected to each other, but the connection is primarily linguistic: all the items are practising one use of the present simple tense. It is true that the items are all about numbers too, but there is no controlling context of situation, and there is no contextualising link between the thirteen items in the drill. Also, there is no relation between the drill and the accompanying text (a dialogue in the main part of the course), other than a linguistic relationship: once again, this consists of one use of the present simple tense.

(Readers should note that in the case of Realistic English, it was the authors' explicit intention not to relate texts and drills in ways other than the strictly structural or linguistic. To that extent, therefore, the relationships between drills and texts in Realistic English are of specific kind.)

There is no doubt that the three variables in sequencing are extremely important, and there is also no doubt that they directly affect student attitudes to drills. First, drills that have rather less than eight or nine items do not give students the opportunity to get into the drill. Also, drills that have rather more than eight or nine items run the risk of boring students. In other words, a lot of drills are too long. Secondly, drills in which the items are linked to each other in some interesting way are without doubt more motivating than those drills in which the items have no more in common than some grammatical point. In the sample drill, the combination of present simple and numbers could have provided a controlling context: eg. shopping, or doing homework, or working out some appropriate calculations. Such a context would allow for a link between the different items, since two or three characters could have been working on the same problem throughout the drill. It has to be said, of course, that drills in which the items are linked do involve some form of artificiality, since it is unlikely that the same sort of sentence or response would be required eight or nine times in just one situation or conversation. But variety can be achieved by ringing the changes on the stimulus, so that the repetitious element of the drill is disguised somewhat. And (notwithstanding the explicit intentions of the authors of Realistic English) another way of linking the separate items in any drill is by relating the drill to its accompanying text. This text is normally a dialogue or a passage of some sort. In the drill, then, the items could use the same situation or the same characters that appear in the dialogue. In this way, the drill becomes less isolated from the main body of the course, and the students begin to see relationships of all kinds between the different parts of their courses.

9. Language learning skill

This component of drills involves

9.1 whether or not a particular, measurable 'language point' is being practised

9.2 whether or not the student is required to use any or all of the traditional language learning skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing

9.3 whether or not teachers and/or students need specific non-tape materials when working in the lab.

In the sample drill, a particular language point is being practised. As is the case with most laboratory materials, the point is a structural one. Other typical language points include phonemic practice, vocabulary practice, co-ordination and subordination practice and so on. In the sample, students are required to listen and speak, and they do not need any materials other than the tape in order to do the drill.

It is particularly this component of drills that is currently under conscious revision. Functional courses attempt to practise not only specific language points, but also awareness of different language uses: eg how to apologise, how to explain, how to describe. Contemporary drill material still has to make use of structural, phonological and lexical data, but the tendency now is to express such data in terms of real functional, plausible contexts. It follows from this that drills may well become increasingly multi-skills conscious. For example, students will be asked to listen and write (note taking); or to read and speak (oral summary); or to listen, read, take notes, and speak (following instructions for using an index, making rapid notes and then passing on the information over the telephone). Such activities, naturally, will require both teachers and students to make use of all kinds of materials at all times, even in the lab itself. The scope for development is enormous, especially in learning situations where multi-media work is an already established part of the students' experience and taste.

C. LISTENING

Most teachers are unlikely to have the time, or even the interest, to record their own listening material for their classes. The technical problems of making good quality recordings, even from radio, let alone the difficulties of collecting 'authentic' speech, make it uneconomical and frustrating for teachers to depend purely on material which they have recorded themselves for their learners. Under these

circumstances, teachers must turn to published, or borrowed, sources, and must then find criteria against which to measure any potential piece of material. How important each one of the criteria will be will depend on the special circumstances in which the material is to be used, but it is hoped that the criteria below will offer some suggestions for the selection of listening material. They are listed and justified in relation to material to be used for the development of listening and comprehension skills, not in relation to material designed to promote active practice, although many of the points will be equally applicable to both.

The main points of concern which are dealt with in this section are:

1. content
2. delivery
3. activities for the learner
4. quality of production

1. Content

1.1 Length of passage

There is no doubt that it is difficult to listen attentively to a long passage, say over five minutes, particularly when there is no visual stimulus to help focus the mind on the topic. On the other hand, exceedingly short passages, say less than 45 seconds, make it difficult for the listeners to get into the topic and are almost over before they have tuned in. This suggests that a short passage requires more preparation, so that the learners know what to expect, or alternatively the learners may need to listen to the passage a number of times before answering any questions on it. It is not necessarily true that the lower the level of the learners, the shorter the passage should be, but care needs to be taken not to demotivate them by presenting them with too much too soon.

Within these extremes, the question of length is less important than other factors, and teachers will, of course, need to consider how much time they have for listening work, how much the students can do alone, and how much pre- and post-work they feel is appropriate to their students. The most important thing to remember is that we are concerned with helping our learners to listen to and process material and not with testing their memory.

1.2 Subject matter

In the early stages of learning, students have a large number of problems. Everything about a new langugage might be strange to them. They will not know what sounds might occur, how fast the language is spoken, what the pitch and intonation patterns are like, what pauses are used for, whether the speakers are pleased or angry, asking or telling. Because of all these simultaneous difficulties, students do not know what to expect when they listen and so cannot be ready to receive a message from what they hear.

They are anxious to be able to communicate as soon as possible, so there seems little point in exposing them to nonsense sounds to familiarize them with the new language first, when they will be more interested and motivated by hearing the language used in a normal situation.

It is important to use straightforward content in the early stages of learning, but this does not mean puerile content. There is a tendency to treat language students as less mature in thought because they lack mastery of the language, and this is as true in listening as in other skills. The content should be as interesting as possible, but it must be appropriate to the language level of the learners. This means that the level will, of course, be well above that which is expected in expression, because comprehension normally develops more rapidly than the ability to speak or write.

2. Delivery

2.1 Style of delivery

Learners will be helped in coping with the difficulties of a new language if, in the early stages, they are presented with a straightforward delivery. Passages spoken in an uncomplicated way, with no great changes of speed, pitch, etc. are most suitable.

Listeners will have difficulty in differentiating between voices too, and so there should generally be no more than three speakers to recognize. It is best to avoid the use of speakers with strong regional accents in the early stages, although it is unrealistic to go to the other extreme and use nobody but RP speakers.

It is not necessary to wait for learners to become very proficient before introducing them to varieties of speech and accent. They will not, of course, be expected to imitate these varieties, merely to understand them sufficiently to be able to communicate with a wide range of different people, and so the plan should be to introduce such things as regional accents, poor enunciation, etc. gradually.

2.2 Speed of delivery

Consideration needs to be given, too, to the speed at which the passage is spoken. It is generally agreed that language learners can decode much more than they can encode; however, in any listening activity, the decoding process lags behind the speaker's encoding. At first, learners will feel the need to try to decode each word as it is received, but it is often necessary to receive a group of words and decode them all together. If the students receive too much material to process, they may misunderstand something early on, or miss something completely, and will then anticipate wrongly, if at all, what is going to follow. If we accept that listeners process groups of words and store them, then the most important part is the silence, the pause, between groups of words, rather than the actual speed at which individual words are uttered. Speech which is slowed down loses its natural rhythm, its elisions, and its intonation and so, whilst perhaps allowing learners to process each word more readily, it does not serve them well in developing their ability to listen to and comprehend normal spoken language. For these reasons, listening material should be spoken at normal speeds (and this will vary over quite a wide spectrum), but the pauses can be lengthened slightly to allow the processing of groups of words to take place. This lengthening of the pauses can sometimes be achieved by re-recording a passage and inserting a little more pause time in natural pause spots. (If teachers wish to use 'authentic' or natural speech, there is no point in re-recording an entire passage with actors or other trained speakers in order to produce the longer pauses, since more is lost in naturalness than is gained in speed by such an exercise.)

To sum up on this very important point of speed of delivery, the plan should be short segments of naturally spoken language interspersed, when possible, with slightly lengthened pauses.

2.3. Redundancy

In all language there is a certain amount of redundancy (ie. non-essential matter). If this were not so in spoken language, the human mind would not be able to absorb and process information at the rate at which it is transmitted. In listening to a new language, students are faced with the problem of differentiating between what is 'vital' and what is 'redundant'. They must endeavour not only to distinguish between vital and redundant words, but to recognize the value or otherwise of such things as intonation, tags, etc. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that the material they listen to must not be completely stripped of all redundant parts, since the mind simply cannot work on such language, even in the listerner's native language, fast enough to cope with all it contains.

The problems for our students is frequently made worse by teachers of EFL and writers of EFL material, who, in an attempt to simplify the language, cut out much of the redundant matter, leaving heavily overloaded language which students cannot process as quickly as they receive it.

Listening can be made easier for learners in the early stages by giving them some indication before they begin to listen of what is going to be vital and what is redundant.

3. Activities

3.1 Things for learners to do

It is said that people 'listen badly', particularly nowadays when there is so much visual stimulus in our lives and the need to listen in order to get information is greatly reduced, particularly by television. When we talk about 'learning to listen', we really mean that we want people to learn to attend to what they hear and to process it within the framework of the new language. We are not concerned in language teaching with trying to improve the physical properties of the ear as a listening instrument.

If we want people to learn to attend to what they hear - to process it, to understand it, to use it, to react to it - then it is necessary to find listening experiences which will involve our learners and which will help them to be <u>active</u> listeners. It is, therefore, a good idea to use material which is accompanied by things that the listeners can do or is at least the kind of material from which activities can be developed.

Some activities will occur naturally. It may be that our students only want to recognise certain bits of information, they may want to remember the information, they may want to write down what they hear, they may want to know the attitudes of the speakers, they may want to respond to these attitudes and so on. It is, therefore, appropriate to use activities and exercises which build on these natural responses. However, teachers may find that other, less closely related, activities are useful to their learners and there is no reason why these should not be included. In the early stages, students will be able to listen and point to pictures giving the correct answer, and to carry out 'listen and do' type exercises. They will soon be able to 'listen and list' and to answer 'true/false' questions. They will then go on, perhaps, to answering multiple choice questions and open questions, to paraphrasing and summarizing and gradually to presenting, for example, the two sides of an argument. From the earliest stages, they should be encouraged to recognize whether the speakers are, for example, friendly or angry, and to work out the relationships between the speakers, i.e. whether they are

father and son, teacher and pupil, etc. In the past, the stress has been on comprehension of content and on finding the 'right' answer. Now we recognize the importance of understanding what is happening in a conversation as well as what is being said, and we acknowledge that the exercises found in books should not be used as test material, to check student learning, but rather as items which re-focus the students' attention on the passage and motivate them to listen again, paying attention to specific features.

3.2 Back-up materials

It is often impossible to have the 'subject' of the words spoken present in the classroom at the time when we want students to listen. It would, for example, be impossible to have a large ocean liner in the room! However, a visual stimulus can be a great help to learners and so back-up material in the form of pictures, charts, models, etc. is a useful addition to the actual material to be listened to. It is unlikely that many teachers at present have facilities available to use moving pictures, but it is often possible to find still pictures which can act as cues or simply as aids to focussing the mind on the topic. It follows that listening material on very remote topics, which cannot be supported by pictorial or other visual matter, is inappropriate for language learners. Recent developments in video technology, which suggest that video tape may become as cheap as audio tape, may bring the use of video within the reach of many, many more people within the next few years, and this should open up exciting new horizons in language teaching and learning.

4. Quality of production

Finally there is little point in playing material to students if they cannot hear it clearly. Commercially produced material is usually of acceptable quality, but care should be taken to check that a tape which is quite clear to one listener sitting near the tape-recorder is also audible to a group in a classroom (if this is the intended use). It is not necessary to reject material which has background noise on it; indeed, some background noise is a useful indicator of the context in which the words are being spoken. However, in the early stages, listeners will have some difficulty in separating out the essential message if there is too much distracting background. Part of the problem of hearing is normally to be found in the learning situation - the actual acoustics of the room, interference from outside noises, the quality of the tape-recorder - but this only underlines the need for good quality sound on the recording itself.

A tape which is agreeable to listen to is motivating for our students and so the judicious use of music or other sound effects adds to the value of the tape.

There are many unexplored avenues as far as listening material is concerned and we, as teachers, will doubtless continue to debate such issues as the relative merits of 'authentic' versus other types of material, the use of listening to provoke speech, the extent to which simple exposure to listening improves the ability to listen and process and so on. We seem to be moving away from the four separable skills approach to language learning towards a more integrated approach, where the interdependence of the skills will be recognized and developed. This kind of approach is full of excitement for language teachers, but it will present us with new challenges both from the point of view of finding the kind of material we will need deciding how we will organise our teaching/learning situations.

Meanwhile, the careful selection and use of those materials which are available to us is of great importance not only from the point of view of achieving our objectives in helping our students to listen effectively, but, more importantly, in developing in our students the desire to listen and helping them to experience the pleasure which can be derived from listening.

Conclusions

When selecting and using taped material, several factors have to be considered. These factors are essentially practical rather than theoretical, and they involve both the source of the material and the nature of the material.

1. The source of any taped material may not be immediately obvious, it may be EFL specific, or it may not. Most taped material used in classrooms originates from major EFL courses, and to a less extent, from other EFL projects. Some tapes are just one part of a very large highly organised course, while others are more self contained. Still other tapes have nothing to do with EFL at all. Many teachers make use of commercial songs, or of radio broadcasts - anything recorded in English. It may well be that in a particular school or college, the students have distinct preferences for EFL-specific, or for non-EFL-specific taped material and this should be borne in mind.

2. Taped material may be consciously for the language lab rather than the classroom, or for any other place. Teachers may well find that material which was originally intended for use in language labs does not work very well in the classroom, yet material which was originally intended for classroom use or even domestic use can work in the lab. This means that taped material designed only for the lab could be less

useful than taped material designed for the classroom, or for individual use. This is certainly true in the case of drills: if drills are successful or useful anywhere, it is in the lab rather than in the classroom or at home. Conversely, a recording of a conversation, or of a news bulletin will be useful not only in the classroom or at home, but also in the lab.

3. Taped material often has a 'theoretical' source of some kind. This may be structural linguistics, or functions/notions, or whatever. Knowledge of theoretical sources helps the teacher to understand why taped material is the way it is, and how it is contructed. However, this is not to say that all taped material is self-consciously based on some theory or other. In fact, less and less material today is based on linguistic theory only, and more is based on pragmatic considerations relating to the development of language learning skills.

4. A point which radically affects the nature of taped material is whether the material is either authentic/realistic on the one hand, or non-authentic/unrealistic on the other. There is a lot of discussion about the meaning of the term 'authentic', and most of the arguments refer to the language on a tape: the performance of the speakers, the realism of the dialogue and so on. Quite simply, when using taped material, it is more reasonable (from the authenticity point of view) to have on the tape something which, in the real world, is likely to be listened to. For example, a tape of someone telling a story is using a more authentic situation than a tape of drills, no matter how natural the recording of the drills might be. Also, a recording of a radio talk or of a pop song is a more plausible taped teaching aid than a recording of two or three characters speaking a dialogue from an EFL course, and pretending that the dialogue is a conversation! The interesting point here is that the radio broadcast may use very formal, slow, carefully articulated English, and the EFL dialogue may use contractions, regional accents, interruptions and so on. But the authenticity resides less in the performing than in the context of situation on the tape.

5. As to the nature of taped material, many of the practical considerations to be borne in mind have been mentioned in the main part of this article. A first set of considerations involves problems such as cost, length, speed (of the tape), the provision of an accompanying tapescript and/or teachers' book, the quality of both the tape itself and of the recording, general availability, and the more specific question of the availability or otherwise of both reel-to-reel and cassette versions of the material. Since taped material can be very expensive, and since it can represent a major commitment on the part of the school or college or university in which you are working, it is worth having a checklist of all such basic points when choosing, and especially when buying tapes. Experience is a great help here: purchasers and users who are unaccustomed to all the various forms which taped material can take are advised to profit from the experience of those who have already tried and tested different tape types.

6. Both teachers and students should be aware of what might be called the methodological nature of any taped material. For example: when the tape is being used, does either the teacher or the student, or both of them, require additional materials, such as an accompanying course book, or pencil and paper, or the teachers' guide, or slides? It is very frustrating to move from mechanical drill work to work which requires the student to read and write at the same time, unless everyone is fully prepared, and unless everyone has enough room in which to work! Sometimes, the students need their work books or course books with them in order to do the taped exercises: sometimes, however, they do not. These seem to be very obvious questions, but they are important ones, especially in language lab work from the points of view of both cost and time.

Finally, the pragmatic teacher might usefully ask the simple question: do the students like the material being used? If they do, then there is no reason to hurriedly reject such material in favor of something allegedly more modern and fashionable. If, however, the students do not like the taped material being used, then the teacher has the job of finding out why. If the students find the material boring, and the teacher is unable to buy new material, then it might be useful to explain the rationale of the material to the students. There is no doubt that students know what they like and do not like to use and listen to, and teachers who respond to their views will be rewarded by having more motivated and successful learners.