

Rationale

The context of this unit plan is largely based on a storybook entitled 'If You Take a Mouse to the Movies' written by an award-winning American author, Laura Numeroff. It furnishes P3 pupils with a contextualized and enjoyable learning experience. Task-based approach is adopted during the process of designing the unit plan, and pupils are offered ample opportunity to draw on their pre-existing knowledge and skills to complete meaningful tasks (CDC, 2004). There are three lessons in the unit plan; the teacher would tell the story and interact with students in the first lesson, while the next two lessons strategically work on the aspect of sentence stress/ rhythm.

The unit starts with a storytelling session, which intends to develop the oracy skills of students since storytelling can both promote expressive and receptive language development (Peck, 1989). The teacher would wear a Christmas hat entering the classroom to effectively evoke a mood of Christmas and make students aware that it is time for storytelling (British Council, 2010). Considering that puppets are the substantial resources for teaching young learners (Crepeau & Richards, 2003), the teacher would bring a mouse puppet representing the main character of the story to carry out spontaneous interactions with students. Pupils at Key Stage 1 are encouraged to "make predictions... using pictorial clues and book cover" (CDC, 2004) while listening to a story, and thus the teacher would ask plenty of both display and referential questions to train their higher-level thinking skills, for example, the teacher would ask students to tell what they can see on the book cover and ask them what the mouse would do after buying popcorn. The post-task of this lesson echoes with the Directed Listening and Think Activity introduced by Stauffer (1980). Students would recall their memories of the plots of the story and exploit their creativity by drawing what they want to hang on a Christmas tree. This aims to elicit verbal responses from pupils to ensure that they can comprehend the story.

Advancing the understanding of sentence stress/ rhythm requires learners' ability to identify the difference between content words and function words, to utter schwa /ə/ correctly, and to perform linking in a sentence. According to the data generated from the corpus developed by Chen, Wang, Wong & Chan (2014), among the recordings of 40 Hong Kong and Mainland college students, 100% of them have the problem of the absence of consonant-vowel linking, which clearly shows that students should be taught about linking so that their pronunciation could be improved; 21 speakers in the corpus (over 50%) also have problems related to pronouncing schwa, including the insertion and omission of schwa and changing the schwa sound into other vowels such as /e/, /ɒ/ and /əʊ/. Hu (2017) points out that Chinese EFL learners commonly pronounce words in a sentence with the same force, which makes their speeches fail to maintain rhythm, while it is also extremely common to find that speakers in the corpus utter function words (e.g. the auxiliary do) in the same speed and stress as uttering content words (e.g. people).

The two lessons following the storytelling session are designed to work on improving students' mastery of sentence stress/ rhythm. The second lesson intends to make students understand and practice the correct pronunciation of schwa and linking, while the third lesson focuses on the differentiation between content words and function words and at last students would bring these three aspects together to produce a sentence with the correct sentence stress.

The slides for the storybook are not uploaded due to the problem of copyright, but you may buy the book online on <http://www.bookdepository.com/> or you may find the following online video helpful <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ2DGNiiUjY>; while you may download the accompanying PowerPoint slides specifically designed for teaching lessons 2 and 3.

References

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Unit outline

Level: P3
Number of students: around 30
Unit: Let's decorate a Christmas tree!
Source material: If You Take a Mouse to the Movies by Laura Numeroff
Number of lessons: 3
Time of one lesson: 35 minutes
Learning Targets/ Aims:
By building a context of Christmas and drawing on the storybook as the primary source material in the unit plan, students are able to:
1. Show their listening and speaking skills through spontaneous classroom interaction after listening to the story
2. Understand how to perform consonant-vowel linking and pronounce schwa
3. Differentiate content words and function words in a sentence
4. Produce a sentence with the correct use of sentence stress/ rhythm

Lesson 1

Learning objectives:
<i>By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Language items:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- develop listening and speaking skills by giving verbal responses to the teacher and the mouse puppet- identify the gist or main ideas in the story with the help of cues
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills and strategies:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- guess the likely development of the story by using personal experiences

Previous knowledge:

- most of the vocabulary items covered in the story:
cover, title, Christmas, Christmas tree, star, drum, angel, present, popcorn, winter, snow, snowman, the movies, etc.
- understanding the meaning of 'will' and its contracted form

Main learning activities / tasks:

- Storytelling
- Spontaneous interaction with students

Blackboard / Whiteboard Planning:

- Using the projector to show the PPT slides of the story

Teaching & Learning resources / aids:

- The storybook & PPT slides showing the storybook
- A mouse puppet
- A Christmas hat
- Worksheets (please refer to the Appendix)

Lesson procedures (and estimated duration):**Pre-reading task (5 minutes):**

- Introducing the mouse puppet to the class.
- The mouse is shy but wants to make friends with the class.
- Ss have to welcome the mouse → build the relationship.
- Write "If You Take a Mouse to _____" on the blackboard and ask Ss to give some ideas of where we should take the mouse to.
- Tell Ss that we are going to take the mouse to the movies, i.e. the cinema/ the theatre, today.

Storytelling (15 minutes):

- Go through the cover of the book and then ask Ss to tell what they can see on the Christmas tree, e.g. a star on the top.
- Invite Ss to contribute their ideas while having fun with the mouse.
- Constantly ask Ss to predict what will happen next and interpret the pictures so as to elicit their verbal responses to develop their speaking skills, for example, “How will the mouse use the popcorn string?” and “What festival is it?”.
- The teacher can imitate the voice of the mouse and do some physical actions to make it more interesting, for example shivering because of the cold weather.

Post-reading task (15 minutes):

- The story ends with a question “Is there anything missing (on the Christmas tree)?”, while the answer is actually the popcorn string the mouse has wanted to hang on the Christmas tree.
- Before doing the post-reading task, the teacher plays the online video of a native speaker Ms. Becky reading the story, so that Ss can get familiar with the story.
- The teacher then gives out a worksheet to every student. Ss have to illustrate the story they have just listened to, by first writing down some keywords related to the post-task, i.e. ornaments, hang, stand, look, popcorn string. The worksheet can be found in the Appendix.
- Ss draw a Christmas tree first and then draw the missing popcorn string and other ornaments they would like to hang on the Christmas tree. They are given 7-8 minutes to finish their drawing as a response to the story.
- Invite 2-3 students to come up to the front to talk about what they think is missing on the Christmas tree and other ornaments. There is not a fixed answer, so Ss can give any reasonable answers as they want. The presentation session lasts for 7-8 minutes.
- Pronunciation support would be given if Ss have difficulty in pronouncing some words.

Appendix

Listen to the story again, and then write down the missing words.

“When the _____ are done, he’ll _____ them all up.”

“Then he’ll _____ back to _____ at the tree.”

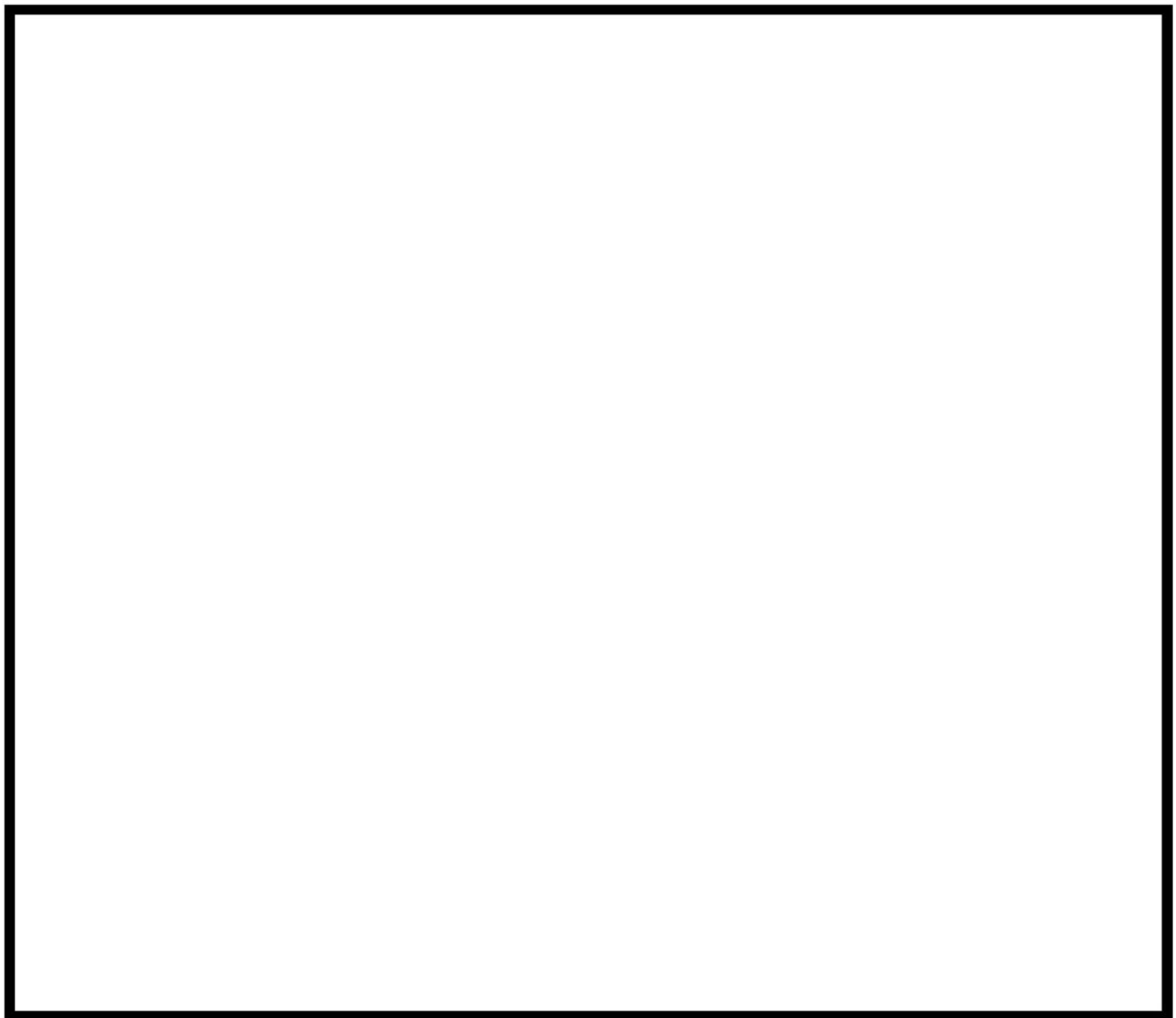
“He’ll notice the _____ is missing.”



Draw a Christmas tree first.

Then draw a popcorn string on the Christmas tree.

What else do you want to hang on the Christmas tree? Draw them!



Lesson 2

Learning objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- Pronounce schwa correctly and understand how it differs from other stressed sounds
- Perform linking in a sentence

Previous knowledge:

- Pronunciation of the vocabulary found in the story

Main learning activities / tasks:

- Pronunciation learning and practice of schwa and linking, based on the context of the story

Blackboard / Whiteboard Planning:

- Using the projector to show the PPT slides

Teaching & Learning resources / aids:

- 2 sets of worksheets (please refer to the Appendix)

Lesson procedures (and estimated duration):

Warm-up (5 minutes):

- The teacher builds the same context again by bringing up the mouse puppet.
- The teacher imitates the mouse to ask Ss about the plot of the story to recall their memories, e.g. “What did I do yesterday?” and “What did I hang on the Christmas tree?”.

Teaching schwa (15 minutes):

- By drawing on that the mouse has decorated the Christmas tree yesterday, the teacher tells students that the mouse now feels tired.
- As he is tired, he makes the schwa sound, which is similar to the sound people make after they work all day long and then have a rest.

- Each student receives a worksheet and they are asked to first try to read some selected sentences, then the teacher plays the online video in which a native speaker of English Ms. Becky reads aloud those sentences. Please refer to the Appendix for the worksheet
- Ss are given some time to try to circle what words contain the schwa sound, e.g. “take a mouse to the movies”, “Christmas tree”, “neighbour’s yard”, “carrot”, “blanket”, “sing along” and “ornaments”.
- The teacher explains the difference between schwa and other full vowels, then students are asked to practice the schwa sound and read aloud those words.
- The teacher picks students to read aloud the words, and they will be given small gifts if they read the words correctly (in terms of pronouncing schwa).
- The teacher can draw on the online corpus to let Ss listen to two recordings in which 2 Hong Kong ESL speakers, a Maths major and an English major, read a passage ‘The Boy Who Cried Wolf’ and make pronunciation mistakes in pronouncing the schwa sound

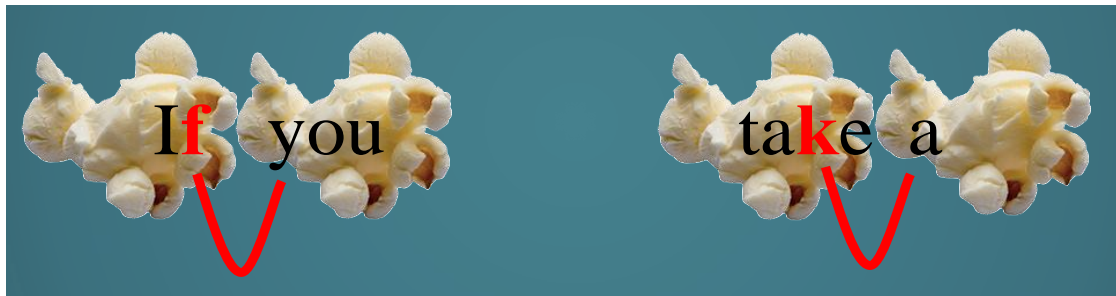
“There was once a poor shepherd boy who used to watch his flocks in the fields next to a dark forest near the foot of a mountain.”

Maths major (more obvious mispronunciation):
<http://corpus.ied.edu.hk/phonetics/ViewPassageTwo.aspx?id=23&feature=undefined>

English major (better pronunciation):
<http://corpus.ied.edu.hk/phonetics/ViewPassageTwo.aspx?id=34&feature=undefined>
- Ss are expected to at least point out that the first girl mispronounced the articles “a” and “the”, which are used as examples previously.
- The teacher then plays the recording of a native speaker reading the passage, to provide a correct demonstration and ask them to circle the schwa sounds on the WS. By playing the recording 2–3 times, the teacher can practice pronouncing the schwa sound with Ss.

Teaching linking (15 minutes):

- Using the concept of the popcorn string mentioned in the story, the teacher introduces linking to Ss.
- As the teacher puts the flash cards on the blackboard, e.g. “if you take a mouse”, students are asked to first listen carefully to the teacher reading the clause, and then to notice which words are linked together.



- The teacher reveals the answer first by using a red chalk to link those two letters in order to set an example, then more phrases/ clauses can be used as practice.
- Examples:
 - “he’ll ask you for some popcorn.”
 - “when you give him some popcorn.”
 - “he’ll want to string it all together.”
- Each student is given a worksheet and has to jot down some notes, i.e. writing down the words from the examples and linking the letters, while the teacher carries out teaching. Please refer to the Appendix for the worksheet.
- After the teacher’s instruction and practising the above 4 examples, the teacher tells the class that the mouse likes singing Let It Go, a popular song among children, and invites them to first sing the song, then to listen to the song again noticing if there are any examples of linking.
- Ss are given some time for finding out which words are linked together in the chorus. The teacher checks the answers with Ss and explains them afterwards.

- Despite the difficulty, the teacher can reassure Ss that they have already done a good job finding out some examples of linking.
- Go to <http://corpus.ied.edu.hk/phonetics/ViewPassageOne.aspx?id=22> and play sentence 4. Ask Ss to help improve the boy's pronunciation by linking words, by linking words on the WS.

“But old habits won't change without a lot of hard work, will they?”

Appendix

The mouse is tired and makes a sound “a” ...

Try to read these sentences,

and then listen to how Ms. Becky reads them...



1. If you take a mouse to the movies
2. Then he'll want to hang it on a Christmas tree
3. On the way home, he'll see a snowman in your neighbour's yard

Can you hear the difference?

Can you hear the “a” sound in some words? Circle those words.

take a mouse to the movies popcorn Christmas

ornaments carrot blanket neighbor

nose couch nice and cozy sing along

Listen to 2 girls reading the following sentence.

There was once a poor shepherd boy who used to watch his flocks in the fields next to a dark forest near the foot of a mountain.

Listen to a native speaker reading this. Circle the “a” sounds.



Write down the words from the examples on the popcorn.
Then, use a **red pen** to link the letters.



As we sing *Let It Go*, try to link the lyrics!

Let it go, let it go
Can't hold it back anymore
Let it go, let it go
Turn away and slam the door
I don't care
what they're going to say
Let the storm rage on
The cold never bothered me anyway



A boy in the recording did not link words together. Can you help him?

But old habits won't change without a lot of hard work, will they?

Lesson 3

Learning objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- Identify content words and function words in a sentence
- Produce a sentence with correct use of sentence stress/ rhythm, by employing the knowledge of pronunciation taught in these two lessons

Previous knowledge:

- Pronouncing schwa properly and consonant-vowel linking
- Self-introduction

Main learning activities / tasks:

- Learning and practising the differentiation of content words and function words
- Reading aloud the story using correct sentence stress

Blackboard / Whiteboard Planning:

- Using the projector to show the PPT slides

Teaching & Learning resources / aids:

- Flash cards of big and small Christmas balls

Lesson procedures (and estimated duration):**Teaching the difference between content words and functions words**

(20 minutes):

- The teacher shows an example of a sentence that contains both content words and function words, e.g. “if you take a mouse to the movies”.
- Considering that it is not appropriate to use metalanguage in teaching, the teacher explains the idea of content words and functions words by comparing them with the big red and small blue Christmas balls hanging on the Christmas tree.

- Example:

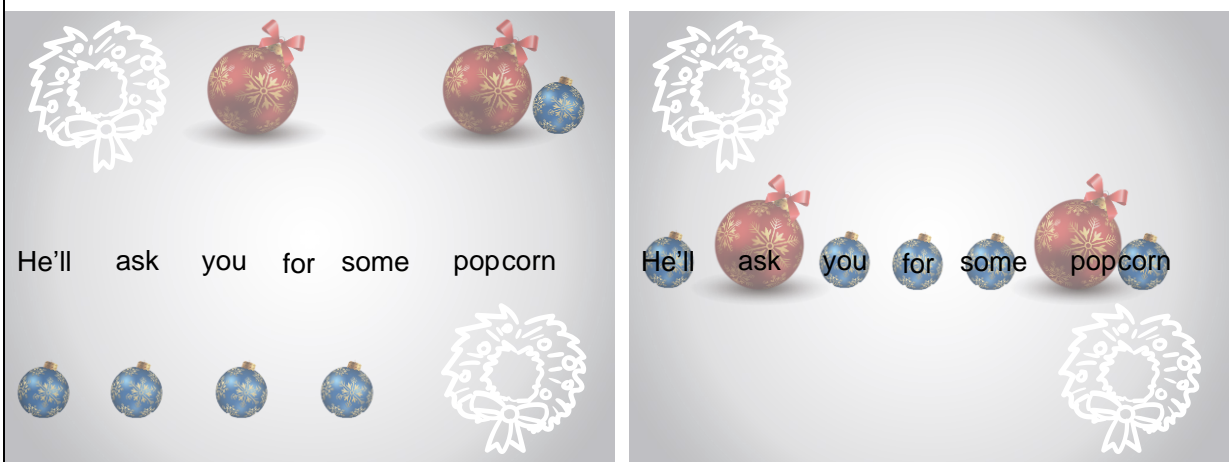


- The teacher reads aloud the example and tells Ss that even when the small blue Christmas balls are taken out, we can still understand the meaning of the sentence with the aid of the big red Christmas balls, i.e. the content words (while the teacher does not need to mention the term).

- Then the teacher tells Ss about the rhythm in the sentence: the big red Christmas balls are just like the beats (i.e. stressed) in a sentence. It would be difficult for students to understand how it works by just listening to the teacher's verbal explanation, so the teacher's demonstration would be important.

- After reading aloud the clause several times, the teacher takes another clause "he'll ask you for some popcorn". The teacher gives Ss the number of both big red and small blue Christmas balls, then asks them to allocate them in the clause before showing the answer.

- Example:



- The teacher then asks Ss to form groups of 4 to 5, and each of them receives a worksheet. Please refer to the Appendix for the worksheet.

- Each group has to work on one to two particular sentences to figure out where the 'big

red and small blue Christmas balls' are located. On a worksheet, there is a hint showing the number of both types of Christmas balls.

- Ss will analyse the following extracts, while 3 groups will analyse the first one and 4 groups will analyse the second one.
 1. When you give him the popcorn, he'll want to string it all together.
 2. Then he'll want to hang it on a Christmas tree. You'll have to buy him one.
- Ss use red pens and blue pens to draw the corresponding Christmas balls on the words.
- While doing group work, the teacher can mingle in the class to offer help and feedback.
- The teacher then asks Ss to read aloud the sentence in groups. Instant corrective feedback would be given.
- Go to <http://corpus.ied.edu.hk/phonetics/ViewPassageOne.aspx?id=6> and play sentence 4. Ask Ss if there are 'beats' in the recording while the answer is no since the girl spoke English under the L1 influence (Cantonese is a syllable-timed language).
- Ask Ss to locate the big red and small blue Christmas balls in the sentence.

Extension activity (15 minutes):

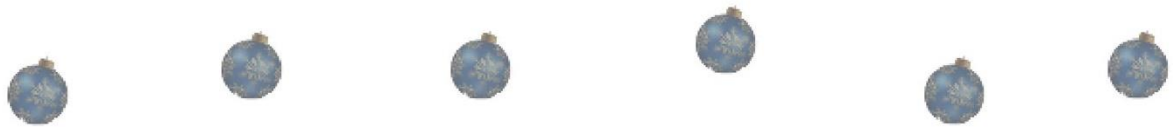
- This session intends to relate the pronunciation features taught in these 2 lessons to Ss' real life situations. Ss are first asked to write a self-introduction, which is their pre-existing knowledge, on a worksheet. They are then asked to incorporate the correct pronunciation of schwa, linking and rhythm while introducing themselves.
- There are guiding questions on the worksheet to help Ss write down the self-introduction, so that they can introduce themselves to the mouse with improved pronunciation.
- After Ss have finished writing, the teacher writes the following on the blackboard:
 1. Is there any 'a' sound (schwa)? What should you do?
 2. Is there linking? Can you link some words together?
 3. What words are the 'big red Christmas balls'? What should you do?
- Given time to practice, Ss are invited to come up to do oral presentations.

Appendix



When you give him the popcorn,

he'll want to string it all together.



Then he'll want to hang it on a Christmas tree.

You'll have to buy him one.



The mouse really wants to make friends with all of you.

He also wants to know more about you!

Now, write something to introduce yourself to him!

You can write about...



1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What school do you go to?
4. What do you like to do?
5. What do you like about Christmas?