

Listen and Don't Repeat (out loud): Pronunciation Practice in the time of Covid19

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My classes restart next week. We are going to be face2face. Of course, I'm thinking about how to keep everyone safe.

We are supposed to be careful about any kind of activities where people speaking is likely to spray, thus spreading droplets and potentially the virus. We often hear this about singing. It seems like the kind of "Listen and Repeat" activity so common in pronunciation practice is similar.

I've long found pronunciation activities that focus on prosody (rhythm, stress, pitch, etc.) to be more effective than drilling minimal pairs (/rice/, /lice/), etc.

One problem with pronunciation practice as it is usually done is that it is really boring. And bored students don't really pay much attention.

From next week, I'm going to teach my students how to do silent pronunciation practice activities. I start by asking "Where does pronunciation begin?" Someone will probably answer, "The mouth." I'll say, "Right. And where else?" Eventually we'll have a list: tongue, teeth, lips, voice box, diaphragm (*kakumaku*). Those are all part of it. Then I'll suggest, "Part of pronunciation starts in your mind."

I'll do a very short "typical" (listen and repeat) pronunciation practice with a couple key sentences from an activity we are about to do. Then I'll ask them to say those sentences again, silently. They really are saying them – their mouths are moving—just no sound. They pay attention to their tongue, teeth, lips, etc. They imagine the sound in their mind as they pay attention. Then they practice a few more times, continuing to listen to the words in their mind.

I've already made a copy of the handout "Language models and the senses" from: <https://tinyurl.com/langmodel-senses>

In my classes where the students want to become teachers, I'll give them a copy of this handout. Over the semester, we will do many of these pronunciation activities, just silently. They are focusing on the pronunciation in their minds as well as sensation in their bodies as they repeat the sentences silently.

All of the activities on this page except "plug your ears" and "pronunciation patty cake" will work with silent pronunciation practice. If you are teaching on-line using something like Zoom, all of the activities work with speaking aloud practice.

Good luck with your teaching.