

TEACHING THE LITERARY SKILLS OF SPEAKING AND WRITING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A PROACTIVE APPROACH

Oladunjoye Oluwayomi Sefiu Ayanfe, PhD
Associate Professor, English Language Education
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT: *This paper discusses the teaching of two aspects of the English language at the Secondary School level. It is a position paper that highlights the Curriculum content of Continuous writing and Oral English; It also attempts a practicable and effective approach to both aspects of English as the author provides perspectives into the teaching of both.*

KEYWORDS: English as a second language, Oral English, Writing, Continuous writing, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, many speakers of English as a second language have experienced challenges in the proper use of the language especially in the areas of phonology, grammar and continuous writing. In fact, the poor usage of English as a second language in both teaching and learning circumstances cut across the four skills – listening, reading, speaking and writing and across all cultures. For example, according to the National Survey of the Ministry of Education in Thailand, and based on the results of tests carried out in 1997 and 1998 on Thai learners’ of English proficiency, unsatisfactory results which were found in the four main skills: writing, reading, listening and speaking (Wiriyachitra, as cited in Khamkhien, 2010).

Multiple teacher/student reasons have been advanced to be responsible for poor students’ output among which are students’ level of cognition, cultural environment, teacher’s professional development etc., “The professional development of Mexican ELT scholars, for example, has been influenced by the professional standards of teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), driving an increase in the demands of both training and developmental programs” Trujeque, Encinas & Thomas (2015)

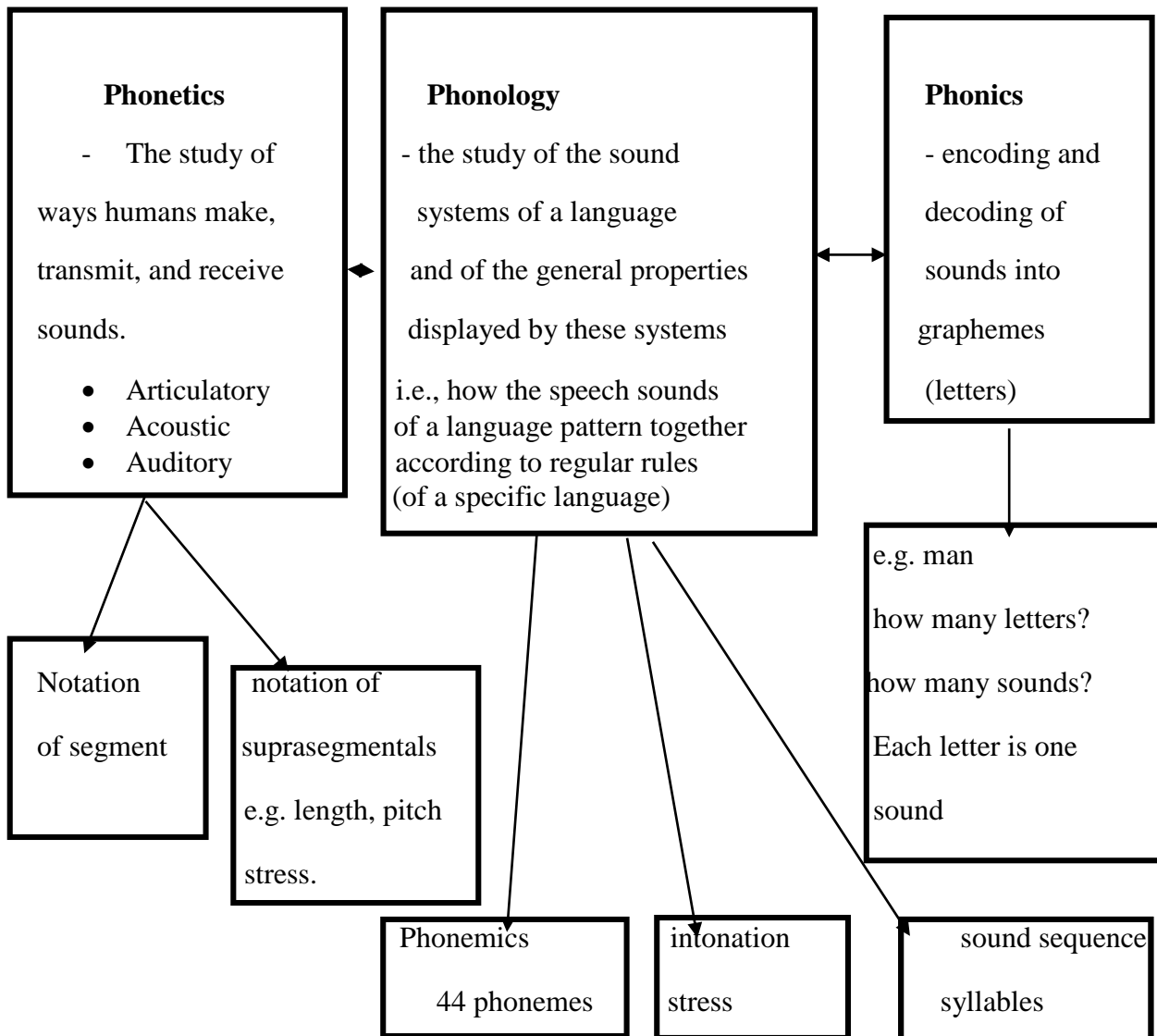
The fault maybe traced to the poor method of teaching adopted by teachers and that consequently makes them end up recycling poor input. This then accounts for why blunders in the pronunciation and usage of the language make the rounds among students and teachers alike because teaching is all about ‘garbage in garbage out’. To this end, efforts have been made by scholars to launch remedial and palliative measures toward ameliorating or reducing this menace to the minimum. It is, therefore, the aim of this paper to put a search light and suggest possible ways of proffering solutions to areas that maybe posing a problem during the teaching and learning of Phonology of English and Continuous Writing as it were. We shall be examining the distinction between

phonology and phonetics and then narrow it down to the study of both the segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English without losing focus on how to teach both. Moreover, important aspects of continuous writing will also be examined pointing out the best way of imparting same in students.

Objectives

1. To expose readers to seemingly difficult aspects of Phonology of English and Continuous Writing
2. To suggest strategies for making the teaching of Oral English and Continuous Writing easy for teachers of English
3. To suggest a few WAEC Phonology and Essay questions for personal practice

Phonetics and Phonology Differentiated (Adapted from Rebecca Chen, 2015)



From the diagram above, it is obvious that what we intend to study in this paper is the Phonology of English otherwise referred to as Oral English because of the specificity which Phonology stands for as against Phonetics.

Segmentals

In English Phonology, there are 44 phonemes (sounds) consisting of vowel and consonant sounds. Each of the sound segments has its own characteristics and descriptions. Let us examine them as follows.

The Vowel Sounds

These are sounds which can best be explained as follows:

- They are produced without any tangible constriction in the oral cavity
- They are generally voiced and non-nasal except when they are made to be nasal by surrounding nasal consonant sounds, e.g. mean

Vowel sounds can mainly be divided into two, namely: **monophthongs (pure vowels)** and **diphthongs**. The third category of vowels is not that popular and some scholars always remain silent about them. They are called **triphthongs**.

The Pure Vowels

There are 12 pure vowel sounds in English. They are better explained using the following chart:



Adapted from Rebecca Chen, 2015

The chart above shows that some vowel sounds are long indicated by (:) while some are short. In view of that, we have 5 long vowels and 7 short ones. Examples of where each of the sounds occurs are as follows:

1. /i:/ - **seat, beat**, etc
2. /ɪ/ - **sit, ship**, etc
3. /e/ - **get, fetch, head**, etc
4. /æ/ - **mat, rat, plait**, etc
5. /ɑ:/ - **mart, mar, father**, etc
6. /ɒ/ - **pot, mot, lock**, etc.
7. /ɔ:/ - **port, always, saw**, etc
8. /ʊ/ - **put, good**, etc.
9. /u:/ - **move, shoe, soup**, etc
10. /ʌ/ - **cut, but, shut**, etc
11. /ɜ:/ - **work, bird, word**, etc.
12. /ə/ - **above, butter, about**, etc

Descriptions of Pure Vowels

Pure vowels can be described using three categories:

1. **The height of the tongue:** this indicates whether the vowel is:
 - Close, i.e. the height of the tongue is close to the hard palate, e.g. /i:/, /u:/
 - Half close, i.e. the tongue is almost close to the hard palate, e.g. /ɪ/, /ʊ/
 - Half open, i.e. the tongue is raised to the lower part of the mouth, e.g. /e/, /ə/ or
 - Open, i.e. the tongue is lowered as much as possible into the mouth, e.g. /ʌ/, /ɑ:/
2. **The position of the tongue raised:** there are 3 positions with which a pure vowel can be pronounced, namely:
 - Front, i.e. the front part of the tongue is what is raised the highest, e.g. /i:/, /ɪ/, etc
 - Centre, i.e. the central part of the tongue is what is raised the highest, e.g. /ʌ/, /ə/, etc.
 - Back, i.e. the back part of the tongue is what is raised the highest, e.g. /u:/, /ʊ/, etc.
3. **The shape of the lips:** we have three shapes which the lips form in the pronunciation of pure vowels:
 - Spread, i.e. the corners of the lips are not forward, e.g. /i:/
 - Neutral, i.e. the corners of the lips are neither rounded nor spread, e.g. /ə/
 - Rounded, i.e. the corners of the lips are brought forward, e.g. /u:/

The Diphthongs

These are vowel sounds formed with the combination of two pure vowels such that there is a glide from one sound to the other at their pronunciation. This is not an indication that a diphthong is two sounds. It is still one sound constituting a syllable.

There are two types of diphthongs. They are:

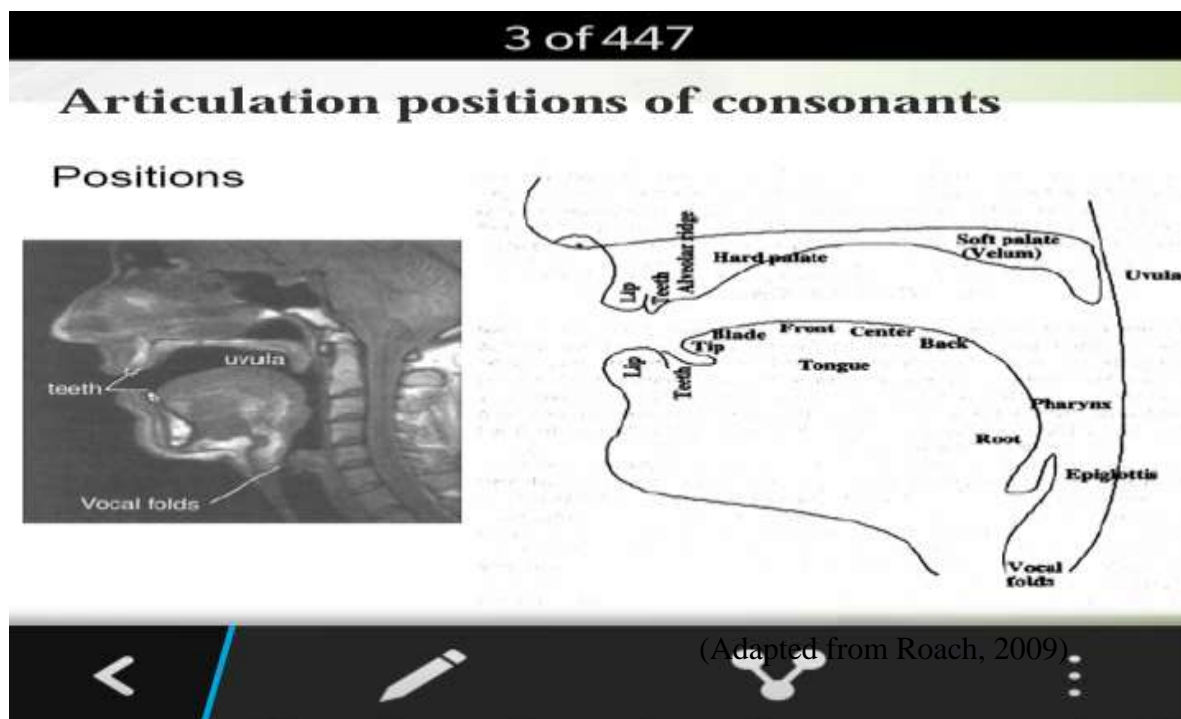
1. Centering diphthongs: these diphthongs glide to the centre, e.g. /ɪə/, /eə/ and /ʊə/
2. Closing diphthongs: these move from one open vowel to a close vowel, e.g. /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əʊ/ and /aʊ/

The Triphthongs

These sounds are made up of three pure vowels. There are five of them and they consist of closing diphthongs followed by the schwa, e.g. /aɪə/ (fire), /eɪə/ (payer), /ɔɪə/ (employer), /əʊə/ (slower) and /aʊə/ (hour)

The consonant sounds

Consonant sounds are sounds produced with some level of constriction in the oral cavity. There are 24 consonant sounds with different points and manners of articulation. These points and manners of articulation are best understood using the following diagrams:



1 of 446

What to teach: Segments (4)

Consonant Chart : 24 phonemes

Table 1 *Chart of English consonant phonemes*

		Place of articulation							
		Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar (Post-alveolar)	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Manner of articulation	Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
	Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
	Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
	Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
	Lateral				l				
	Approximant	w				r	j		

see p. 52 of Roach, 2009

10

Description of Consonant Sounds

Consonant sounds are usually described using three yardsticks:

1. Place of articulation: this refers to the kind of articulators used to produce a consonant sound. Using the above chart, we have the following:
 - Bilabial, i.e. the coming together of the two lips in the pronunciation of the following sounds: /p/, /b/, /m/
 - Labiodentals, i.e. the use of the lower lip and the upper teeth in the pronunciation of the following sounds: /f/, /v/
 - Dental, i.e. the use of the tongue touching both the upper and the lower teeth in the pronunciation of the following sounds: /θ/, /ð/
 - Alveolar, i.e. the use of the tongue touching the alveolar ridge in the pronunciation of the following sounds: /t/, /d/, /l/, /n/, /s/, and /z/
 - Palato-alveolar, i.e. the use of both the body of the tongue and the tip to touch the hard palate and the alveolar ridge simultaneously while pronouncing the following sounds: /ʃ/, /dʒ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, and /r/

- Palatal, i.e. the body of the tongue touching the hard palate at the pronunciation of the following sound: /j/
 - Velar, i.e. the back of the tongue touching the velum at the pronunciation of the following sounds: /k/, /g/, /ŋ/
 - Glottal, i.e. the consonant sound produced using the glottis, e.g. /h/
2. Manner of Articulation: this refers to how each of the consonant sounds is produced. With the aid of the above chart therefore, we have the following:
- Plosives, i.e. consonant sounds that are produced with a puff of air. It is otherwise called a ‘stop’ because there is a buildup of air behind the articulators before production. They are: /p/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /b/
 - Fricatives, i.e. consonant sounds produced with a hissing sound. They are: /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/, /θ/, /ð/
 - Affricates, i.e. consonant sounds produced with a sharp hissing sound having a temporary air buildup. They are: /dʒ/, /tʃ/
 - Nasal, i.e. consonant sounds produced where the velum is lowered to allow air passage through the nasal cavity. They are: /m/, /n/, /ŋ/
 - Lateral, i.e. the only consonant sound produced where the air coming from the lungs passes through the two sides of the tongue - /l/
 - Approximants, i.e. the consonant sounds produced where the articulators involved do not actually touch each other - /w/, /r/, /j/
3. Voicing: this refers to whether a consonant sound is produced with a vibration of the vocal cords or not making it either voiced or voiceless. The following are the voiceless consonant sounds in English: /p/, /t/, /k/, /s/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/. Others are voiced.

Suprasegmentals

Under this segment, we shall be examining stress and rhythm. In stress, we have primary and secondary stress but our attention will be drawn only to primary stress. In a word, stressed syllables are usually produced longer and louder than others. In a sentence, only content words are given stress except when important attention is to be paid to a particular grammatical word.

Stress within words

- Noun/Verb Pairs

Noun	Verb
‘Conduct	con’Duct
‘Import	im’Port
‘Record	re’Cord

- Compound Nouns

‘**Post** office

‘**Inspector** general

‘**White** house

Suffixes

Suffixes can be classified into three according to their effects on stress

- Stress preserving – ‘ment’ as in enter’**tain**ment
- Stress attracting – ‘ette’ as in cigar’**ette**
- Stress shifting: they cause the stress to shift to another syllable within the word but not to the suffix, e.g. ‘tion’ as in ‘educate edu’**ca**tion

Rhythm and Stress

This gives some interesting pattern to words in a stretch of sentence. Examples:

- ‘**Jack** and ‘**Jill** went ‘**up** the ‘**hill**
- And ‘**Jill** came ‘**tum**bling ‘**after**

Practice

Before checking up the transcription of the following words, attempt to pronounce them. Thereafter, you can check your dictionary to determine how correct you are.

1. Impasse

20. Ewe

2. Beret

21. Aye

3. Fiancé

Give one example each of where the

4. Rapprochement

following sounds occur: /f/, /tʃ/, /θ/

5. Tithe

/j/, /ŋ/, /dʒ/, /ð/

6. Paris

7. Suite

8. Restaurant

9. Placed

10. Pivotal

11. Placebo

12. Amoeba

13. Garage

14. Circuit
15. Chamois
16. Memoire
17. Towel
18. Solace
19. Matrix

Continuous writing

Writing is an expressive skill. The thrust of writing is in its message. For as long as writing exists, continuous writing will always be a focal point at all levels of education. Writing could be creative, continuous and/or calligraphic. For examination at the secondary school level, continuous writing which is basically the test of essay and letter come in different forms. To this end, we need to point out the essay types as follows:

1. Narrative essay: this focuses narration which can be either of personal experience, other people's experience, or based on fiction
2. Descriptive essay: In this genre of continuous writing, efforts are made to give a description of an event or anything whatsoever. What we are meant to describe maybe real or fictitious as it were. The main idea behind this type of essay is that, the person describing must be well acquainted with the issue in question.
3. Argumentative essay: the primary aim of this type of essay is to pose an argument which makes the writer to either stand for or against an idea. To now convince an examiner or a reader, the writer must have a very strong argumentative power to defeat the opponent.
4. Explanatory essay: Just like a descriptive essay, an explanatory essay too requires versed knowledge on whatever issue or matter you are to explain for it is difficult to explain what you do not know.

All the aforementioned forms of essay have similar features as follows:

Features of Continuous Writing

1. Title: this refers to the heading given to a particular essay.
2. Introduction: this is what launches ideas into the essay. The introduction should be attractive to keep the reader going.
3. Body (content): this is where all the ideas about the essay are written in a logical order to allow one thing to lead to the other.
4. Conclusion: essays are usually concluded by summarizing or making recommendations

For easy teaching of continuous writing in schools, teachers are advised to build their pedagogy using the following acronym: (COEMA)

C – Content, O – Organisation, E – Expression, MA – Mechanical Accuracy

Content

Teachers of writing are to check the relevance of the body in relation to the topic or title of the essay. If, for example, students are asked to write an essay on ‘How I Spent my Last Holiday’ which is ordinarily narrative in nature and some of the students derail completely from narrating how the holiday was spent, then, the teacher can re-direct the focus of the essay to what the topic demands.

Organisation

Under ‘organisation,’ teachers should focus the title of the essay in relation to sequencing of ideas in a logical order such that one thing leads to another. Other areas of attention under this heading include: paragraphing (there are two forms – block form or indentation), proper placement of topic sentence within the paragraph.

Expression

Attention should be paid to the following:

- Proper use of words/diction
- Where idioms are used, they should be used appropriately or else should be avoided
- Composition of sentences, i.e. simple, compound or complex sentences
- The appropriate use of transitional phrases, etc.

Mechanical accuracy

The following should be checked while teaching essay writing:

- Spelling
- Punctuation marks
- Abbreviations
- Syllabification
- Capitalization, etc.
- Tenses and correct verb usage

Test Of Orals (How questions come)

There are seven sections in the test of orals. The whole exercise contains 60 objective questions testing your knowledge of **vowel sounds, consonant sounds, rhymes, word stress, stress pattern, emphatic stress, and your understanding of the phonetic symbols.**

For want of space, we could only select three of these seven sections for the purpose of this write-up. All questions are as recorded in Systematic English (New Edition) by Oluwayomi S Oladunjoye (2015)

Section one tests the candidate's knowledge of the vowel sounds. Each question has a word with underlined letter(s) followed by four options lettered A-D from where you are expected to identify the option that has the same vowel sound as the one given to you. Consider this example.

From the words lettered A to D, choose the word that has the *same vowel sound* as the one represented by the letters underlined.

From the words lettered A to D, choose the word that has the *same vowel sound* as the one represented by the letters underlined.

bark

- A. mat
- B. earth
- C. pass
- D. ward

The correct answer is 'C' because only *pass* contains the same vowel sound as the one underlined in *bark*.

Now practice these exercises

1. bread

- | | |
|-----------|----------|
| A. please | B. place |
| C. head | D. great |

2. light

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| A. piece | B. believe |
| C. tie | D. great |

3. good

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| A. wool | B. tool |
| C. home | D. boot |

4. money

- | | |
|-----------------|----------|
| A. <u>blood</u> | B. regal |
| C. moon | D. both |

Section 3

Rhyme is tested in section three. Rhyme is all about the similar sound which the end part or terminal syllables of two words share. In tackling rhyme, the way the initial parts of the given options sound does not matter. It is the sounds of the terminal or end parts of those words that show whether they sound alike or not. Therefore, as you read these pairs of words, focus on the sounds of the end parts.

Examples:

brains -	grains
stuff	rough
rock	mock
shoe	sue
hail	rail
preach	rich

You will notice that the initial sounds of the pairs of words differ, but their end parts sound alike, thus they rhyme. However, this is not so in poetry where rhymes are noticeable in stanzas or verses. Now, practise these model exercises. From the words lettered A – D, choose the word that **rhymes** with the given words.

1. garnish

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| A. tarnish | B. finish |
| C. punish | D. girlish |

2. purge

- | | |
|------------|----------|
| A. budge | B. wage |
| C. scourge | D. forge |

3. toll

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| A. dull | B. goal |
| C. wall | D. holy |

4. hurry

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| A. glory | B. sorry |
| C. gory | D. curry |

SECTION 5

In section 5, candidates are to identify the option that is stressed differently among the given options A-D. In other words, the stress may fall on the first, second or third syllables of 3 of the four options while it falls on a different syllable of the last option, which the candidate is expected to pick. For example in

- (a) Away (b) apart (c) mentor (d) above. Options A, B and D have the stress on the second syllable while option C has it on the first syllable. C is the answer.

That is the way option 5 is tested in the WASSCE.

In the following options lettered A to D, all the words except one have the same stress pattern. Identify the option and shade your answer in the usual way.

1. (a) impressive (b) conviction (c) revenue (d) approval
2. (a) dessert (b) colour (c) instinct (d) risky
3. (a) discomfort (b) aggressive (c) quality (d) dependable

4. (a) despite (b) petrol (c) vomit (d) wardrobe
5. (a) colleague (b) success (c) challenge (d) vomit

Emphatic Stress

Stress refers to the FORCE with which a syllable or a word is pronounced either when it is alone or in the midst of other words in the sentence.

Word Stress: This can be divided into both Primary Stress and Secondary Stress. The Primary Stress is the syllable that carries the strongest FORCE in a word while the Secondary Stress indicates the syllable pronounced with a lesser FORCE. Examples include:

‘Vomit - Primary stress

Vo,mit - Secondary stress

‘Consent - Primary stress

Con,sent - Secondary stress.

Emphatic Stress on the other hand is used to highlight, draw attention to or emphasize INFORMATION with a stressed word in a sentence.

In each of the following sentences, the word that receives the emphatic stress is written in CAPITAL LETTERS. From the questions lettered A-D, choose the one to which the given sentence is the appropriate answer.

1. The motor car crashed INTO the building.
 - (a) Did the motor lorry crash into the building?
 - (b) Did the motor car park in front of the building?
 - (c) Did the motor car crash beside the building?
 - (d) Did the motor car crash into the electric pole?
2. Mother has invited TEN guests to dinner tonight.
 - (a) Has father invited ten guests to dinner tonight?
 - (b) Has mother invited ten guests to dinner tomorrow?
 - (c) Has mother invited ten guests to lunch tomorrow?
 - (d) Has mother invited twelve guests to dinner tonight?

3. He asked JOHN to come today
- (a) Did she ask John to come today?
 - (b) Did he order John to come today?
 - (c) Did he ask Dad to come tonight?
 - (d) Did he ask John to come next week?

Suggested Senior School Certificate Continuous Writing Questions

Below are suggested SSCE questions that could be of interest to the readers and simple approaches to tackling them:

- (a) Write a letter to your friend in another school asking him/her to attend your literary week. Your letter should include the programme of events for the week and what it promised to offer your friend.
- (b) Write a letter to the Chairman of Local Government asking for a special scholarship support to help you clear your final session school fees and also pay for your WAEC expenses. Give reason why this is expedient and promise you will do the Local Government proud by preparing well for your examination.
- (c) Write for or against the motion “Teenage pregnancy should be aborted”
- (d) Write an article on “Confronting the menace of kidnapping in Nigeria” to be published in a national newspaper.
- (e) Write a witness account of a street robbery for police investigation.

A

INVITATION TO ATTEND LITERARY WEEK

- A programme of events highlighted
- Importance of each programme discussed
- Invited popular speakers listed
- Possible prizes to be won by participating schools listed

B.

REQUESTING A SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT

- Two addresses stated
- Formal salutation recorded
- Indigent background painted
- Other reasons for your requested stated
- Scholarship requested
- Promises of good performance highlighted and action plan on actualizing it
- Conclusion – Formal farewell

C.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY SHOULD NOT BE ABORTED

- Background on why teenage pregnancy comes
- Consequences of teenage pregnancy
- How to avoid teenage pregnancy
- The other side of abortion
- Why pregnancy must be kept irrespective of who has/had it

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, we can see that teaching Oral English and Continuous Writing can be made easy if we take cognizance of the embedded ingredients peculiar to both. It is one thing to be able to identify a problem and another thing to be able to suggest possible solutions. Therefore, our hope is that, this paper will, to an extent, help in proffering solutions to some challenges that teachers of English face in the course of their routine classroom work. Thus, we could recommend as follows:

- (a) Though we may not achieve perfect RP (Received Pronunciation) in our articulation, we would certainly be able to attain near accuracy in the way we use the word. We should aim at becoming a near native speaker.
- (b) Spoken English is easy to learn if we give it the required practice and follow existing models exemplified by the widely quoted authors in this paper

- (c) We can write professionally but then we must start from the understanding of what systematic steps are required to break the ice in continuous writing. This we can do by adhering to proper outlining of our points, making good paragraphs, reading the good writings of others and engaging writing again and again even if there are no people to evaluate our work. The more we write, the more we write better.

REFERENCES

- Khamkhen, A. (2010). Teaching English speaking and English speaking tests in the Thai context: A Reflection from Thai Perspective. *English Language Teaching*, 3(1), 184-190.
- Oladunjoye S.A.O. (2015). *Systematic English for Schools and Colleges*, (new edition) SO4I Publishers, Alapere Ketu, Lagos, Nigeria. A division of SO4I, Educational Consultancy, Limited ISBN 978-33592-0-7, pages 395
- Peter, R. (2009). *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course*. Cambridge University Press
- Rebecca, C. (2015). *English Phonetics and Phonology*. Oxford University Press.
- Trujeque M, Encinas P & Thomas R (2015) Exploring Authorship Development Among Mexican EFL Teacher-Researchers in PROFILE Vol. 17, No. 2, July-December 2015. ISSN 1657-0790 (printed) 2256-5760 (online). Bogotá, Colombia. Pages 43-62
- Wiriyachitra, A. (2002). English language teaching and learning in Thailand in this decade. *Thai TESOL Focus*, 15(1), 4-9.