

# Pssst! Pshsht! -- Teaching A Basic Sound Contrast

BY BETTY W. MCKEEN

Young teenagers at Waiialua High School frequently substitute "sh" for "s" in their efforts to pronounce English. This lesson, told in story form, has proven successful in attracting attention to older students and in providing a basis for oral drill.

## Attract Attention

(Invite attention to the problem by casually telling the following story:) A long time ago, as I was finishing a snack in a plushly upholstered booth in the breakfast shop of the Regis Hotel in Mexico City, I began to get nervous because it was getting close to school time and I wanted the waitress to bring my check. But I was seated next to the wall with five other companions and none of us could see over or around the booth. This didn't bother a native Mexican who was with us. He calmly blew through his front teeth and

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inherit most school problems) would normally be responsible for the coordination of these kinds of programs in a school. The counselor assigns the foreign student to classes and can work closely with his teachers, so he is in a position to elicit their cooperation in a united English Second language program.

Learning a second language is not an easy task for either the student or the teacher, and adjusting to life in a new environment can complicate it. However, cooperative effort can lessen the cultural shock for the student and lessen the frustration for both student and teacher if all school personnel will unite in an effort to solve this challenging problem of teaching English communication to the second language student.

quietly said, "Psssst!" Immediately our waitress came running right to us.

After that experience I began to notice what a powerful sound "Psssst" was in Mexico. I could stand on a busy street corner right in the heart of downtown Mexico City and if I wanted to hail a taxi all I had to do was say "Psssst." And even if he was clear across the busy street a cab driver would hear me, make a U-turn, and come right over to pick me up--in answer to "Psssst."

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A few years later I went to Portugal. By that time I was fluent in Spanish and I could read a little Portuguese because it looked a bit like Spanish. But Wow!--when I heard that language spoken I couldn't understand it at all. It sounded so different!

One afternoon, as I was walking with a crowd to a fiesta, there was a Portuguese lady in front of me carrying a baby. The baby kept peeking over the lady's shoulder obviously trying to attract my attention. When I looked the other way the baby said, "Pshsht!" (/ s /) Then the baby laughed and flirted with me.

I remembered what I had observed in Mexico and I began to watch these sound contrasts in Portugal. This "sh" sound for the "s" sound is definitely part of Portuguese--a sound so endemic that your ancestors brought it half way around the world gen-

erations ago--and it's still with you.

But in English you often use it in the wrong places and some times it can convey the wrong meaning. Look at these words--all spelled with "s:"

see

Sal

sun

Oh, son!

soul

sigh

(Write these words on the blackboard or use prepared cards.) And now pronounce them after me. Again. And again. Do you know what all of these words mean? (Discuss)

Now watch--I'll spell all of these words with "sh" and they'll all mean something different. Look.

she

shall

shun

ocean

shoal

shy

Now pronounce after me. Can you hear the difference? Study the two diagrams. Notice the difference in tongue position.

(Demonstrate positions using articulation diagrams. Draw the diagrams on the blackboard.)

Repeat both columns.

Let's go back and put these sounds on the end of some words instead of on the beginning. Say "gas" (write this on the blackboard, or show it on a card) You know what "gas" means--especially if you drive a car. Now say "gash." You couldn't walk

if you had a bad cut, or gash, on your foot. There is a big difference, isn't there?

Pronounce after me as I write on the blackboard.

gas	gash
class	clash
mess	mesh
mass	mash
puss	push

(Have the class repeat the words comparing the two pronunciations.)

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