

Original Recorded Materials: A Bridge from the Language Lab to the Lecture Hall

by Jeffrey E. Diluglio

The creation and production of original, recorded lecture materials enables an instructor to be highly creative in an often ignored area of English as a second language instruction. Original recorded materials allow the instructor flexibility in the development of pertinent themes for classroom use. They can be produced and utilized in a variety of ways and for many different purposes: listening comprehension, dictation, vocabulary building, cloze exercises, stress and intonation exercises, vowel and consonant discrimination.

This article will concentrate on the development of materials to help ESL students increase their comprehension of university style lectures. International students all too frequently complain that once they have left the protected environment of an intensive language setting, they run into formidable obstacles in understanding their professors' lectures. These students are faced with synthesizing and assimilating large quantities of lecture materials, and many of them are simply unprepared for the task.

Recorded lectures can be utilized in many ways to help overcome this problem. The lectures should be highly factual, logical and inductive in their development of thesis, and highly idiomatic in vocabulary. Students must learn how to listen for key facts (essential for accurate summarizing), be attentive to digressions in thesis, and be sensitive to tone and mood.

The preparation of recorded lecture materials begins with an appropriate idea which can be well developed and which is suitable for a particular audience. For academically-bound international students, an examination of American history, politics or contemporary culture is probably on a list of required freshman courses. Nevertheless, these themes are generally not found in the standard recorded materials available

in the language lab market today. Thus, they are prime candidates for teacher-developed practice lectures.

Having done the required research, the instructor can proceed to the actual writing of the lecture. A clear, recognizable topic sentence in which the thesis is stated serves to illustrate to students the concept of thematic development. They then listen to the various ways that the thesis is expanded, developed, and elaborated upon.

Listening and Note-Taking

Students should be active participants in the lecture process. As students listen, they should take notes with attention to specific details. Note-taking will give them practice in numerical and chronological sequencing, concepts which are particularly difficult for students who have had little

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if any practice in this activity. The lecture should include comparative statistics which will aid students in learning how to discriminate between important and unimportant facts. This trains students to listen to the essential content words, making them attentive and accurate listeners. This activity will enable students to know when the professor in a lecture digresses and to be sensitive to those factual digressions.

Stress and Intonation

Once students have completed the listening portion of the lecture, they may

become involved in a series of related activities. Stress and intonation drills will aid in pronunciation and help eliminate native language interference. Words used in the lecture should be used in these exercises, resulting in greater unity in the drills and, at the same time, an expansion of the students' lexicon. Words selected from the lecture can be drilled in a variety of ways: in choral drills, drills dealing with word families, and in drills concerned with stress shifting among nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

Spelling and Dictation

Spelling is another skill which can be integrated into the lecture learning process. The instructor can dictate on the tape selected words which the student listens to, writes, and corrects. A dictation of a portion of the lecture reinforces two essential skills that students must master: accurate aural comprehension and its transfer to the written form of the language with correct spelling and punctuation. Once again, the content of the lecture unifies these activities, rather than drilling them in a kind of intellectual vacuum.

Reading and the Decoding Process

Reading activities may also be derived from the lecture. A transcript of the recorded lecture can be utilized and distributed to students. Each student can then read the lecture into the tape and record his/her own voice. This activity tests pronunciation, helps develop phrasal reading, and fosters word recognition.

Testing and Structural Integration

Recorded materials are not an isolated resource to be used only in the laboratory. They can be integrated into the classroom: in comprehension questions to test retention

of material, in a discussion of themes developed in the lecture, and in a structured debate. In addition, the instructor has the option to assign further research on the subject matter which might involve an investigation of periodical literature and other source materials.

Suggestions and Hints on Recording:

Since this article deals with non-professionally recorded materials, here are some helpful hints for making recordings sound as professional as possible:

1. It is important to use a good reel-to-reel or cassette recorder that has good tone sensitivity.
2. When recording, one should speak at a normal speed, clearly articulating but not exaggerating.
3. It is essential not to artificially pause in order to allow the student more time than is actually needed.
4. The instructor should pay attention to his intonation, making it as clear and natural as possible.
5. Good pacing of the different activities contributes to a unified and cohesive whole. Producing homemade materials takes some practice and experimentation but the end result is often a product far superior to commercially-produced tapes.

Original recorded materials not only draw upon a teacher's creativity and ingenuity but train international students in essential skills that they will need in order to be successful at the university. These materials are both a valuable pedagogical tool and a challenge to the ESL instructor willing to invest the time and energy in their production and implementation.