



Pronunciation Tutorials: Not Only Sounds, But Also Awareness of Self and Context

An exploration of pronunciation tutorials designed for speakers of English as an additional language (EAL) in a university context in Australia suggests that developing abilities to speak clearly involves more than just focusing on the sounds that are uttered. Students' comments and observations collected during pronunciation tutorials highlight factors that are important for understanding how these speakers successfully manage their spoken interactions. This article reports on what these students say about their experiences and strategies for communicating clearly and effectively at university and while in their professional placements. Implications for the ways that pronunciation tutorials are run include the need to focus not only on the sounds that the speakers make, but also to provide opportunities for them to develop awareness of themselves as speakers and to develop their understanding of the speaking contexts and the associated pragmatic language skills that are required for becoming clearer and more confident speakers.

With internationalization and migration, the student body in universities worldwide is changing. Students arrive in classes with different experiences of formal education and different levels of readiness, confidence, and ability to use the language of instruction. In universities in Australia, the US, and other places, being able to clearly and confidently speak English is essential for success. All students, local and international, need to learn new genres of speaking in academic contexts, such as participating in discussions and giving formal presentations. However, opportunities to practice these kinds of speaking can be limited. Furthermore, university stu-

dents need the chance to practice the speaking involved in tasks specific to the particular occupations and professions for which they are training before they become fully qualified and are working in those jobs. These are new and challenging skills for anyone. However, for some users of English as an additional language (EAL), these tasks present an additional level of difficulty in being able to not only know what to say, and when and how to say it, but also to say it with clear, comprehensible, and confident pronunciation. (Note: *EAL* is the preferred term in Australian contexts, while in the US, *ESL* is more common.) Speaking clearly in a language that one has begun learning later in life can be difficult for many people. Juggling this difficulty with everything else that is going on when learning new genres of speaking is especially daunting.

In this article, I discuss my experiences of working with students who were faced with these challenges. This work took place in individual or small-group pronunciation tutorials. In describing my approach to these pronunciation tutorials, I discuss the importance of taking account of the contexts in which the speaking takes place. I also highlight the need for speakers to become aware of their own speaking and pronunciation and of how others respond to them. The importance of feeling confident and in control of the speaking situations also emerged as consistent themes.

Background

The pronunciation tutorials were part of my work at an Australian university in the early-mid-2000s within a center that provided support with English language and academic skills. Our work at the center was with students who had already met the minimum English language requirements for entry to their university degrees (i.e., IELTS 6 or TOEFL CB 213 / IBT 60 for undergraduate courses and higher for students taking postgraduate degrees) but who still needed to work on their English language skills. Most students coming to the center sought help with their academic writing. However, a smaller number sought help with their speaking, including their pronunciation. Often they would self-refer, or another staff member, a lecturer, or a teacher from within their discipline area might recommend that they seek some assistance from us with their pronunciation.

At that time I was able to work with these students one-on-one, or, if there were two or three requiring pronunciation help at the same time, I would set up a series of small-group tutorials. The number of one-hour sessions each student attended varied. Some came for one session, others continued over several weekly sessions, and some continued in weekly or biweekly sessions over a number of months or

longer. Unlike many of the sessions provided by the center for writing skills, which were regularly planned and run for groups of around 10 or more students (often from particular discipline areas), speaking and pronunciation tutorials tended to be less frequent and were provided as the need arose to individual students or small groups. While I acknowledge that there are useful pronunciation activities that can be done with speakers together in larger groups (and there are increasingly many excellent teaching resources being published that offer ways to do this), I believe individual/small-group work suits the nature of pronunciation learning, particularly for learners at more advanced levels who have varied speaking abilities and needs. I also acknowledge that resources to allow this to happen in terms of staffing are not always readily available in many schools, colleges, or universities.

While the students and I referred to these sessions as “pronunciation tutorials,” the approach taken and the activities we covered were broad and included practice speaking about the content of the courses in which the students were enrolled and the requirements for them to speak either during class in small-group discussions, to speak up in response to a teacher’s question, or to give a formal spoken presentation in front of the group on a prepared topic. There were also students who were studying courses leading to professional accreditation, and they were faced with the challenge of speaking clearly, confidently, and capably in specific contexts related to their professions. (For an example of the speaking needs of professional contexts, see Dahm and Yates, 2013, highlighting the needs of international medical doctor graduates in understanding culturally appropriate ways of communicating in Australian and Canadian contexts.) The student nurses needed to practice communicating in situations such as “hand-overs”—briefing meetings with colleagues about their patients—at the beginning and end of their shifts. The teacher trainees needed to manage classrooms of young (and often unruly) learners and to do this, they needed to speak with assertiveness, confidence, and clarity. Both nursing and teaching students also expressed a desire to learn how to better manage casual conversations in the staff room and other incidental interactions with their coworkers. These less profession-specific speaking skills are important for greasing the social wheels within the workplace (Clyne, 1994; Cui, 2012; Holmes & Riddiford, 2009) and are particularly necessary for newcomers or visitors so that they can make a good impression and form useful alliances with colleagues who can support them during their visit. Many students said that they found these kinds of tasks quite challenging and often attributed the difficulties to their lack of clear pronunciation in English.

This article discusses issues arising from these pronunciation tutorials. The data used here are part of a pilot research project for which university ethics approval was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee. This required all students to be given a written statement of the aims and processes of the research project before commencement. It also involved their signing a written statement of their consent to participate and for their data from the pronunciation tutorials and from our discussions to be used in published papers and conference presentations. In all, 10 students were part of the pilot project. In this article, I report on the views and experiences of five students from among those who were willing to take part in longer discussions about their pronunciation learning as part of my pilot research project. They were two females and three males whose ages ranged from 24 to 55. Two of these were undergraduate students, both in the arts and humanities areas, and the other three students were doing postgraduate studies in business, nursing, and education. All of these students expressed their concern about their pronunciation of English, believing that they needed some help from a teacher or expert to modify their speaking to be able to better manage the contexts in which they were studying or undertaking professional placements. All names used are pseudonyms.

The Approach

My approach in the pronunciation tutorials was to begin by asking the students to consider what it was about the contexts and situations for speaking in English that was challenging for them, why they attributed these challenges to their pronunciation in English, and what additional factors could be associated with their sense that they were not managing as well as they wanted to in those contexts. Often their comments related to their comprehension of what others said or, as Mei (a 30-year-old female graduate student from Taiwan who was studying nursing) described it, the need to be able to “keep up” or “to catch on to what others are talking about.” Initially, responses about pronunciation were generally vague, unspecific, and did not directly relate to the context of speaking but tended to be related to what they had been told or had read were challenges for speakers from their first language (L1) background. For example, Tuan, a 32-year-old male student from Vietnam studying a postgraduate degree in business, told me:

My first language doesn't have the sounds /θ/ or /ð/ and that's why I have problems with them.

This student's pronunciation of these sounds was typically accurate,

and even when it was not, from my perspective these sounds were not the most problematic of nonstandard features of his pronunciation of English. What this suggests is that learners' awareness of their own pronunciation and which "bits" of it cause problems with intelligibility may be limited. (In most situations with these students, their needs and my approach were guided by the intelligibility principle—"learners simply need to be understandable" [Levis, 2005, p. 370] rather than aiming for nativelike pronunciation.) Therefore, increasing student awareness of how they actually spoke in their additional language was an aim of the pronunciation tutorials.

I explored with the students why they thought it was their pronunciation that was causing difficulty. In some cases, it was clear that pronunciation was a likely source of a lack of intelligibility because they spoke with heavily accented English. However, as Munro and Derwing (1999) have demonstrated, having an accent is not a guarantee that a speaker will be unintelligible. Some students reported that their tutors or lecturers or their supervisors/mentors/preceptors in work-placement contexts had told them that they had difficulty understanding them. However, it was not always clear whether these supervisory staff had explicitly stated to these students that pronunciation was the source of the issues, or whether it was the students themselves who interpreted this feedback to mean that their supervisors found their pronunciation difficult to understand. Nevertheless, the students themselves were sufficiently concerned about aspects of their speaking to prompt them to take the step of contacting our center and attending one or more pronunciation tutorial sessions.

In my approach, I employed a number of techniques that I found to be useful for both raising students' awareness of their speaking and potential issues with their pronunciation, as well as giving them opportunities to practice particular features of their pronunciation that they thought were making them less clear. It is important that, rather than solely focusing on specific pronunciation targets, the techniques contributed to an overall approach that encouraged students to have ownership of their speaking and to take responsibility for monitoring and modifying their ways of speaking.

Technique 1: Use of Video Recordings

A key feature of my approach in the pronunciation tutorials was the use of video recordings. These allowed us to revisit what the speakers had said and captured not only the words spoken and the sounds made, but also the facial expressions and gaze, the hand gestures and body posture, and an overall awareness of the whole person as a speaker within an interaction. This was useful because it anchored

the communication within the physical body of the speaker and provided a way of underlining the entirety of the speaker's performance (Haught & McCafferty, 2008). I believe this was important because it helped develop awareness of the complexity of speech/communication and that pronunciation, an important part of this kind of communication, needed to be managed alongside other features. Using video recordings for language learning has been described as a way to facilitate "shared practice" (Tochon, 2008, p. 428) and it offers a means for self-monitoring, a process that Ingels (2010) and others have linked to self-correction of L2 pronunciation.

The students' reactions to using video varied. Most students were comfortable seeing themselves in this medium. However, one undergraduate student, Johnny (a 24-year-old student of arts), was so embarrassed at seeing himself on video that he could barely bring himself to watch the recording and put his head on the table, laughing nervously. After attempting this activity a second time, it was evident that this was too embarrassing for him and we moved on to do different kinds of work. This kind of anxiety around watching videos of oneself can be an issue (Penn-Edwards, 2004).

Another student, Lin, a woman in her 50s from a Chinese background and studying an undergraduate degree in arts, was less anxious about seeing herself on video but was more surprised about how it showed her something different from the view she had of herself. She said:

oh I think I'm just a normal people speak normal heh heh heh
heh but you look at when I look at the video oh it's (1.1) so so dif-
ferent yea::h. (1.5) it's um (1.9) lack of ss confidence an (0.5) very
clumsy I heh heh heh

However, in a later session, Lin explained how she found using the video helpful:

I I think the .. taping the video really good for me .. it's different
from hear the [audio] tape .. more a more awareness of what I'm
doing

(See the Appendix for transcription conventions used in student quotes.) This highlights for me that all the students were very different people, with different experiences, and different readiness to confront and see themselves as others saw them when they spoke English. I often wonder whether this shyness and reticence to be videoed may have diminished through the years with the increased prevalence of

recording devices in cell phones and tablets and the custom of sharing one's image via various forms of social media. It is possible that today, university students in many countries with high usage of mobile devices are going to be more comfortable with making, viewing, and sharing videos of themselves speaking both in their first and additional languages.

Technique 2: Eliciting and Analyzing Speaking

In the pronunciation tutorials, I prompted the students to speak in an extended way on a topic that was relevant or important to them. I might ask them to talk about their studies or their plans or I might ask them to describe what they had been doing recently in their lives outside the university. The students were encouraged to talk about their chosen topic for at least a couple of minutes and I video-recorded them. Immediately after that, I played the video recording and we both watched it through completely. I would then ask them to comment on what they noticed about the way they spoke. We would often watch the video a second time, and I would give the students control of the play/pause on the recorder so that they could stop the video at any point that they found interesting or worthy of comment. Some students could more easily describe features of their speaking that were salient to them and comment on their contribution to the clarity of the speaking. Other students found this difficult to do, at least initially. The importance of, and need for, metacognitive skill development in relation to pronunciation is evident in the research literature (e.g., Couper, 2015; Reed & Michaud, 2015) and was borne out in what I saw with these students.

I asked the students which features of their pronunciation they thought were well managed, and which features they believed they needed to practice further. As indicated above with the example involving the sounds /θ/ or /ð/, students would often talk about features that, for me, were not obviously making their speech less intelligible. On the other hand, the features that did cause some difficulty for me may not have been mentioned. Because I believed it was important to give these students some control over what it was that they wanted to focus on in regard to their pronunciation, I made sure to spend time working on those aspects that the students picked out and saw as relevant and important. (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, discuss linking agency to ways that “individuals assign relevance and significance to things and events,” p. 143.) The actual activities practiced were tasks that are typically used in pronunciation textbooks: minimal pair exercises and listen-and-repeat activities of sounds, words, and strings of words containing the target sounds. In subsequent sessions, I also in-

roduced some instruction and practice on the pronunciation features that I thought were making them less clear. Typically, these included suprasegmental features: word and sentence stress, intonation, pausing, and sometimes voice quality. I would introduce these concepts, naming and explaining each feature. For most of the students, these features and the terms used to describe them were new. If they knew anything about pronunciation, it related to the segments/sounds. It is not surprising that the features they initially identified as problematic were sounds because they generally had more experience of learning them in language classrooms, and they also had some metalanguage to talk about them.

Technique 3: Transcription and Spoken Accuracy

In some of the pronunciation tutorials, I would ask the students to write down what they heard themselves say, and I encouraged them to transcribe (orthographically) exactly the way they had expressed their ideas, including their hesitations, filled pauses, and false starts. To some extent these disfluencies were associated with the use of the additional language. However, to raise awareness of the “inaccurate” nature of spoken language, I sometimes asked students to tell the same or a similar story in their first language. We would record and listen back to this, and then I would ask them to consider how “accurate” their language was. In nearly all cases, the students were able to recognize many of the same or similar disfluent features in their speaking of their L1. The aim of this activity was to develop an awareness of the differences between spoken and written language, and an understanding that “ungrammatical” talk is typical of most speakers not only in their second or additional languages, but also in their first language.

This was an eye-opener and an important step for the students because initially judgments of the quality of their speaking focused on accuracy at a range of levels: phonological, lexical, and syntactic. By highlighting the imprecision or “rubbery-ness” that exists around accuracy in spoken language, we could begin to question the basis upon which judgments about pronunciation were being made. We discussed how assessment of pronunciation often involved measuring its proximity to nativelike models. Not only is that unnecessary (if we adopt the intelligibility principle), but it is also problematic, given that the concept of a native speaker is highly contested (e.g., Davies, 2003). Furthermore, this was highlighted by the fact that in the Australian context, most commercially available pronunciation materials model North American and UK accents, so already we were aware of variation in pronunciation.

The use of student-created transcriptions of their own speaking,

and the discussions that ensued, brought into focus the different positions that could be taken on what accuracy in speaking could mean and allowed space for students to see that they had choices in relation to what kind(s) of English accent they might use, but most important, it brought into stark relief the need, above all, to be intelligible.

Technique 4: Second Takes and Modeling

The students were invited to do a “second take.” They would repeat their talk either from memory or using their transcription. If they chose to use the transcript, I encouraged them to not simply read from their written text but to use it to remind them of what they wanted to say. If they changed their text slightly, that was not important. The important thing was to repeat the talk and have an opportunity to communicate it more clearly. We would record this second take and watch it together. I would again prompt them to talk about what they noticed about the way they spoke and their pronunciation. I would again offer some suggestions about features that one or both of us thought needed some attention.

Sometimes I would offer to record my telling of the students’ texts/talks so that they could hear their words spoken with different and more targetlike pronunciation. I was mindful when doing this that I did not take over their story or their telling. To minimize the feeling that I was appropriating their words, I would suggest in one session that they could ask me to do the recording in the next session. Then, I left it to them to request a recording from me. I was careful not to present my own performance of their story as the perfect example to be emulated. As indicated above, they could choose which variety of English accent or combination of accents they preferred.

When we listened to my version of their talk, I would prompt them to consider where I had paused and which words and parts of words I had stressed. This included listening for increased volume and emphasis in my voice as well as watching the video to see whether my hand or facial gestures or eye contact contributed to this emphasis. I asked them to listen for the intonation in my voice and whether they could hear pitch changes at different points in my speaking. More important, I wanted them to consider the totality of the performance, the individual features related to pronunciation, along with the other elements that they thought made a positive contribution to the communication and to consider which of the features that I used might be something they could adopt to enhance their own speaking clarity. In addition to the techniques used during the pronunciation tutorials, I will outline issues that emerged from the discussions with the students.

Managing Impressions and Pragmatic Competence

One issue involved the links between pronunciation, pragmatic competence, and the need to manage the impressions others make of a person. Yates (2017) connects these elements and argues that for second language (L2) speakers wanting to enter the world of work, “the ability to create the right impression – the impression they intend to create through English – is vital to their professional, and perhaps also to their personal success” (p. 228). This is particularly important when one is new to a workplace or other setting or when one has limited time to put one’s best foot forward (e.g., during a job interview). Yates explains that “[i]mpression management – trying to manage the perceptions that others have of us – is something that we all do every day, but something that is even more challenging in an L2” (2017, p. 228).

One student, Koichi, a 34-year-old male student from Japan who was studying a graduate qualification in education, commented on the impressions made by others based on a person’s pronunciation:

And I found I think pronunciation, better pronunciation makes people feel they speak better English .. but I think that ah .. people tend to judge somebody’s English depending on pronunciation .. but I think that’s also the case too .. but yeah of course, if someone with thick accent or bad pronunciation of English .. but they might have vast knowledge and quite wide vocabularies .. quite smart

This is concerning as it indicates how accent may be a trigger, often subconscious, for negative judgments of a person’s intelligence, competence (Lindeman, 2005), credibility (Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010), or even how grammatical his or her speaking is (Kennedy, 2015). Lippi-Green (2012) provides a useful overview of discrimination based on accent in the US, while in Canada, Munro (2003) documents accent discrimination in employment, stereotyping, and harassment cases. In Australia, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007) identified accent as a feature attracting discriminatory practices in regard to employment of L2-speaking migrants.

It was apparent from the discussions during the pronunciation tutorials that some students’ pragmatic capabilities within the specific contexts they found themselves were insufficient. At times the lack of ability in this area was not recognized or understood by the learners and as a result they often resorted to blaming their pronunciation for a breakdown or lack of success in the communication. For example, Koichi spoke of not being able to participate during morning tea talk in the school staff room. He said:

I don't know how to keep talking when they ah .. they ask about my weekend and I tell I say .. to them .. what I did .. then **nothing** .. nn did I say something wrong

When asked why he thought the conversation did not continue, Koichi responded:

I I don't know that they understand .. they can .. they do smile .. nod an ah ... but then ah ... they talk with other person ... that's all

Whether it was because his colleagues were not able to understand Koichi's pronunciation is not completely clear from Koichi's answer. However, it is possible that Koichi's understanding of how small talk takes place in this work context may be limited. In fact, on several occasions he commented that much of what his colleagues spoke about in the school context was difficult to understand, not so much because he did not understand the words they were using, but because he did not understand the point of what was being said. To begin to unpack this, I raised with Koichi the nature of the staff-room chat. I asked him about his experiences of other work contexts either in Australia or in Japan, his country of origin, as a way to explore the possible differences in how these exchanges are structured and what might be the varied expectations of participants.

This was a fruitful way of exploring potential differences that may exist across cultures, but also ones that are more contextually and/or personally mediated. In other words, was it a Japanese/Australian thing? Was it a school staff-room thing? Or was it something about the personal style of the individuals involved, both Koichi and his fellow teacher(s)? There was no way of obtaining definitive answers to these questions. However, asking these questions opened up the possibility that there were factors beyond Koichi's personal communication style, including his pronunciation, that were at play here. Through our discussion and by asking Koichi whether he noticed this kind of behavior occurring only when other staff spoke to him (and not when they spoke with each other) or whether it was just the one person that this happened with, we were able to explore other possible reasons apart from his pronunciation for what he perceived were limitations to his successful participation in staff-room social conversations. Doing this lightened the burden of responsibility for successful communication that Koichi appeared to have been carrying.

As Koichi was between teaching placements, I suggested that in his next placement he take time to observe how teachers interacted in

the Australian staff room and to watch how often and at what time of day short and less extensive “polite” exchanges took place, compared to when longer and more engaged discussion occurred. Also, I asked Koichi to observe who among the staff tended to talk mostly to their own group, and who was more likely to talk to everyone, including newcomers and others, such as visiting student teachers. This kind of exploration was useful because it allowed Koichi to step back from seeing the challenges of communication in these contexts as solely to do with his pronunciation and therefore (largely) his responsibility, and he began to see that they were shared by all participants and shaped by other constraints, including the time of day and what else was taking place.

Speaker Confidence

A final issue that I will discuss in this article and that arose frequently during the pronunciation tutorials had to do with the students’ confidence when taking part in classroom discussions or group work. In these situations, understanding their weaknesses was an important step for the students in being able to address them. While students may not have developed their pronunciation sufficiently to avoid all problems associated with their lack of intelligibility, the fact that they could identify likely features of their pronunciation that might be causing problems for their interlocutors gave them confidence and a way forward. This was evident in the comments of Mei, the Taiwanese student mentioned earlier who was studying a postgraduate nursing qualification. In our discussions, Mei revealed that her nursing classmates had difficulties understanding her pronunciation, but she also realized that she could assist them by employing the strategies I introduced during the pronunciation tutorials, such as watching the reactions of the people she was speaking with, explicitly checking whether they had understood her or not, and clarifying what she had said (e.g., “Could you understand what I said? Is my accent a bit difficult for you? Would you like me to repeat that? What I said was ...”). These strategies, along with Mei’s realization that some of the Australian (L1 English) students in the class would speak up regardless of whether they knew the answer or had done the preparatory reading for the class, gave Mei much confidence. She said:

I found it’s getting better because my classmate ... they can’t they can I think they can understand me more .. and eh ... mmm maybe I have confidence because I think I got the key point where what is point my weakness

Lin also spoke frequently about confidence and considers the possible links with pronunciation:

now I realize .. if I have .. it depends on who I speaking to eh .. sometimes I have more confidence sometimes not em .. it seems not very much to do with the pronunciation is it .. yeah but I know if I improve my pronunciation .. I will have more confidence to .. speak with nother peoples yeah .. more speak .. different people yeah

When asked about why she feels more confident, Lin made the following reflection:

°where is the confidence° come from (9.6) .h because I realize .. it's no use to .. afraid or worry (1.0) every word you can't say properly .. I I'm trying but sometimes you just can't (1.4) and eh (1.5) so the best way is to: ignore it and .. if you can .. correct it and something like that heh heh hhh

Comments such as these about confidence when speaking and in relation to pronunciation frequently arose in the discussions with these students. While possibly a “catch-all” term used to describe a range of emotions, the prevalence of references to confidence underlines the connections being made between being able to speak clearly and speakers’ feelings and sense of capability, and their reflections on what they can and cannot (*yet*) do.

Conclusion

This article has explored my experiences working in a university context with speakers of English as an additional language who wanted to improve their pronunciation. This work took place in pronunciation tutorials that I set up with individuals or small groups of students. The insights about pronunciation learning and about working in this way have been gained through the work itself and also, most valuably, through discussions with the students as part of a pilot project that documented their experiences of the pronunciation work that we undertook.

Following the intelligibility principle, the nature of the tutorials gave the students the opportunity to speak at length about a topic of their choosing. This gave them ownership of the ideas being discussed and ensured a level of familiarity with content that predetermined phrases or passages provided by the teacher cannot accommodate. The use of video recordings was central to the approach. It allowed

multiple levels of feedback on the language used and on other embodied, physical aspects of the performance. However, it is important to acknowledge that video recording was intimidating for some students.

In this project the recordings provided a useful way of disentangling what the students thought they were saying from what they actually said. This allowed the students to revisit things they had said and how they had said them so that they could attempt to understand what was contributing to (or was impeding) the clarity of the message. Transcribing what was said in the recordings revealed important differences between spoken and written language. It also helped challenge understandings of what is “grammatical” or “accurate” and provided awareness of, and space for, variation. This is important when thinking about the different accent choices available to speakers. Repeating the speaking or doing a “second take” allowed the students to focus on the features of their pronunciation that they and I thought needed attention. I offered to provide students a model of their speaking by recording their talk for them to listen to and watch. In our discussions, managing the impressions that others gained when they speak emerged as an important issue for some students. Students’ levels of confidence in their abilities to speak clearly in the contexts they found themselves within their university studies and outside the classroom also was linked with speaking clearly in different ways.

The pronunciation tutorials described in this article were part of an evolving approach for working with EAL speakers on their pronunciation. It arose out of a need to work with university students in ways that addressed their speaking needs and focused on the key features of their pronunciation, which were connected not only with their intelligibility, but also with other aspects of their lives and who they were as people.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the students who took time to discuss their pronunciation, share their experiences using their additional language, English, and explore with me their views on what helps them to speak more clearly and effectively.

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Appendix Transcription Conventions Used

..	Unfilled pauses of less than one second in duration.
(1.2)	Unfilled pauses of one second or longer to the nearest 10th of a second
° °	Talk between degree symbols is noticeably softer than surrounding talk.
heh	Laugh syllables
hhh	Audible outbreath
.hhh	Audible inbreath
bold	Talk produced at much higher volume than surrounding talk