

## Teacher Notes

### Successful speakers... use a variety of ways to manage hesitation

These teacher notes give you guidance on how you could manage the activities with your class. We encourage you to consider follow-up activities where students can reflect on their language production and to create checklists for them to consider their own performance. You may want to offer extra support on some activities, eg by doing an example with the whole class first and/or having an observation checklist for when they listen to each other. You may also prefer to present the activities in other ways.

The focus of this lesson is to reassure students that it is okay to hesitate when you are speaking but that it is better to use 'conversation fillers' such as 'well' and 'right' rather than always saying 'erm' and 'er'. There may be quite strong differences here with learners' L1 and what they feel comfortable with. **Point out that they should try not to hesitate too much but when they do they should try to 'cover' their hesitation by using some of the options covered in this worksheet.**

#### Feedback

Remember to give students feedback on how they are performing throughout. You may choose to cover different aspects of speaking in single parts, eg activity 1 = pronunciation, activity 2 = fluency, activity 3 = accuracy etc, then give whole feedback on the final activity.

## Successful speakers... use a variety of ways to manage hesitation

At Trinity College London, we have studied the scripts from hundreds of our speaking exams. We wanted to find out what makes some test takers more successful than others. One thing that test takers who perform better do is use a variety of ways to manage hesitation.

Here is an example taken from a GESE exam.

### Activity 1

Read the conversations between a test taker <TT> and an examiner <E> aloud.

How does the test taker show he or she is hesitating? By using 'erm' and 'er'.

Is it only the test taker who makes hesitation sounds? No – both the test taker and the examiner hesitate.

#### Corpus extract

<TT> You should, erm, erm, ask her if she would like to play, to play, to swim...

<E> (silent-waiting to understand what the test taker is saying)

<TT> ...another...another sport...but, erm, if she likes it very much, erm, erm, she, erm, she...she...

<E> Yes, she does and erm, you know, she's very good, she's really very good at playing football.

<TT> Erm and erm, it is a good idea to make, erm, er, all the possible arrangements for her to play football.

#### Trinity tip

It is natural for all speakers to hesitate while they are speaking. Sometimes they are searching for the right word and sometimes they are searching for an idea. However, if you make too many 'erms' and 'ers', the conversation becomes difficult to understand and uncomfortable to listen to.

### Activity 2

Talk and make notes. Work in threes. Two of you speak together. The third person sits behind (so you can't see him or her) and notes down how many times you make hesitation sounds. Choose from these topics:

- What I ate yesterday
- Why I like my best friend
- What I would do if I won the lottery

Now do the activity again, choosing from these topics:

- How can we help to protect the environment?
- Do you think there should be more facilities for disabled people in your town?
- What is the most important thing you have learnt in your life so far?

When did you make the most hesitation sounds? .....

## Activity 3

### Read

There are some expressions you can use instead of 'erm' or 'er'. These expressions will help to make your speech sound more natural.

#### For example:

##### 'Well...'

(this is very useful when you start to talk and want some time to think)

*What time do you usually get to work?*

*Well...usually around half eight or nine.*

##### 'I mean...'

*Does he often ask you to lend him money?*

*Not often...I mean...he's only asked a couple of times.*

##### 'you know'

*Is she a good cook?*

*She's...you know...she's not bad but she's not exactly good.*

##### 'hold on'

(this means wait)

*What's the name of that place we went to last night?*

*Oh it's...hold on...it's...hold on...GoodFood!*

##### 'right' 'ah, right'

*I've just been told I have to work every Saturday this month.*

*Right...and is it just for this month?*

##### 'like'

*Did you do anything interesting at the weekend?*

*I was like... really tired so I stayed home all day Saturday.*

## Activity 4

Read this conversation aloud with a partner. Every time there is a hesitation sound think of what else you could say instead. Choose from the words and phrases above.

<A> Tell me a bit about your family.

<B> Erm **Well**, I've got two brothers and one sister so, erm **you know**, it's quite a big family.

<A> And do you all still live at home?

<B> Erm **Well**, my brother, er **I mean**, my elder brother is at university so he's, erm **like**, he's not always there.

<A> Are you the youngest in the family?

<B> Well, no, my sister is only eleven so she's, erm **you know**, she's the youngest.

<A> What do you like doing together as a family?

<B> Erm **Well**, together? Do you mean erm **like** eating together?

<A> Yes, or other activities. Do you do any sports together, go skiing, go walking together, that kind of thing?

<B> Erm **All right**, erm **well**, we don't really do any sports together but in the summer we sometimes, erm **like**, sometimes go to the beach together.

<A> And is there a restaurant or somewhere that you like going to together?

<B> Yes! It's called, erm **hold on**, Crazy Taste!

## Activity 5

Now speak to your partner again on the same topic as in activity 2. Try and use some of the expressions above. Which do you think is clearer; the direct questions or the 'rising intonation' questions?