

ZONE OUT

Fluency and Accuracy in TOEFL/IELTS Speaking

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<https://heyzine.com/flip-book/862b990cf8.html>

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ISBN: 978-9942-40-901-0

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Acknowledgments

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A comprehensive list of sources used in this book is available on page 102 in the “Sources” section.

Some definitions

Fluency: Refers to the ability to speak easily, without pause, thinking, or hesitation.

Accuracy: Refers to the accurate use of grammar and vocabulary while avoiding repetition and having zero to minor lapses and errors.

Use of Resources: Refers to using a range of common and uncommon vocabulary and grammar in speaking or writing.

The problem

Learning a Language does not happen in a straightforward fashion. The process of learning a new language is full of ups and downs and, just as knowing how to ride a unicycle does not mean one can actually ride it, the sheer knowledge of vocabulary and grammar (linguistic knowledge) does not constitute the ability to speak a foreign language, nor does it mean learners can utter correct sentences when interacting with other people. Language learners often learn objective words and simple grammar very quickly and can use what is learned in familiar real-life situations. However, speaking about unfamiliar topics and using more complex language, such as is required to obtain advanced level scores in international tests of English such as TOEFL and IELTS exams, can be quite challenging for most students and they usually make grammatical mistakes and exhibit inaccuracies while speaking.

The challenge stems from the fact that most learners often do not have enough opportunity to speak about unfamiliar and subjective topics and their classroom practice does not involve proper corrective feedback. Consequently, a good portion of their linguistic knowledge remains unused and “passive”. In these cases, the learner understands passive words or grammar tenses when they hear or read them but can’t use them in speaking when faced with the situation, or can only use them with slips, errors, and in inaccurate ways.

This is problematic when considering the fact that TOEFL and IELTS expect candidates to demonstrate “fluency” and “accuracy” as well as “a range of resources” in their speaking. The rubric for every international test, including IELTS and TOEFL, contains three main categories: Delivery, Fluency and Cohesiveness, and Accuracy and Range. Hence, to obtain a high score in speaking in TOEFL or IELTS, candidates need to demonstrate a high level of fluency and control over the abovementioned categories and be able to speak easily and without error.

Though essential, fluency and accuracy are not often addressed directly in exam preparation resources. Current exam preparation materials and educational content merely focus on providing content for improving candidates’ grammar and vocabulary and are limited to some tips on how to approach and answer exam questions, which means providing lesson plans, exercises, or practical techniques to help candidates improve their general “fluency” and “accuracy” has been completely neglected.

Some series such as “Vocabulary for IELTS” and “Grammar for IELTS” published by Cambridge University are just a few examples of a myriad of books focusing on vocabulary and grammar for international exam candidates. Other series, such as “Collins Speaking for Exams” and “Barron’s TOEFL IBT” that focus on general speaking practice and exam tips, only address “delivery” and focus on how to answer the exam questions. There is no doubt that such resources are invaluable in widening candidates’ range of vocabulary and grammar; however, as many would agree, the sheer knowledge of linguistic resources is not enough, and exam candidates need to focus on improving their productive skills and try to boot their fluency and accuracy in their exam preparation endeavor.

IELTS/TOEFL exam candidates often possess enough knowledge to speak fluently and accurately but may struggle to do so when faced with real-life situations or the exam since they often have not had enough chance to practice. Fluency and accuracy are essential but often ignored necessities in speaking for IELTS and TOEFL that can easily be improved through corrective feedback techniques. To date, there is no book or teaching material to help candidates improve fluency and accuracy in their speaking. Therefore, students have to rely on classes and materials that are meant for other purposes and require a lot of time and a great deal of money to study or review General English grammar and vocabulary over and over again without proper feedback. This is a problem that this book tries to address.

The solution

To address the problem, a bridging course that utilizes corrective feedback is proposed to fill the gap between General English Classes and Exam Preparation Classes. Zone Out is a bridging course that encourages teachers to utilize corrective feedback methods to make sure candidates speak with minimal lapses and errors before taking preparation classes. Zone Out provides a framework in which teachers are equipped with the tools and guidelines necessary to provide students with corrective feedback and help students improve their fluency and accuracy.

The Zone Out approach requires students to think about the topics provided in each unit, prepare and plan their answers using the grammar and vocabulary they already know but don’t often use in speaking, and try to use them while speaking in class. By active preparation and intentional use of linguistic knowledge, learners can retrieve “passive knowledge” from their long-term memory and use it in their speaking to make the passive information active again. In this process, teachers use corrective feedback to help students overcome their speaking errors and recommend better wording and grammar to use in their speaking.

With Zone Out, teaching is done in a welcoming atmosphere where students feel safe to respond to challenging questions and have the chance to ask controversial ones. Students are encouraged to explore topics, think, and express their opinion without the fear of making mistakes, saying the wrong thing, or eating the forbidden fruit. Zone Out teachers are aware that making mistakes along the way is an integral part of improving one’s language skills and that using explicit corrective feedback and metalinguistic tips is a proven way to fluency and accuracy in speaking and activate learners’ “passive” knowledge.

How to use this book

If all of your money were in a safe deposit box in a bank far from where you lived, making withdrawals would be a daunting and time-consuming task. This is exactly what happens when we ask learners to speak about a subjective concept using complex language in English. Most learners possess the required linguistic knowledge to speak about such topics fluently and accurately but they struggle to do so and have to pause and think to recall information every time they need to answer a question. The only way to remedy this is to practice speaking about unfamiliar topics as much as possible while receiving corrective feedback as often as possible.

Hence, students are strongly recommended to think about the topic of every unit in this book and read every single question to plan their answers before presenting them to the class. They are expected to think about the topic, concepts, and questions provided in each unit of this book and plan, choose the right word and grammar, and get ready to present answers and speak in class. While speaking in class, the teacher is expected to take notes on their utterances and give them corrective feedback on their inaccuracies. This entails reviewing the grammar and explaining why the vocabulary used by students was incorrect.

What's more, each unit ends with a section called "task" which asks students to speak about a topic while recording their voice. This task is aimed at enhancing students' metalinguistic knowledge and improving their ability to self-correct their mistakes and wrong utterances, which leads to metalinguistic awareness and further accuracy and fluency. To do the tasks, students are required to review their teacher's comments, review the grammar and vocabulary again and try speaking about the same topic again while recording their voice and trying not to make the mistakes pointed out by their teachers. By active participation and effort of the students, they can remove some of the inaccuracies from their speaking every session.

How to give corrective feedback

Corrective feedback is a form of performance feedback used to improve student achievement, where teachers provide feedback to students to reinforce expectations and correct student errors during lessons. When feedback is coupled with elicitation and students are encouraged to think about their mistakes and find the underlying reason for each one, it can boost students' confidence and self-esteem while at the same time making the teaching process unique, personal, and tailored to students' needs. Corrective feedback is a relatively known but often overlooked technique involving either explicit or implicit feedback on learners' performance in written or spoken form.

Corrective feedback is classified into six categories of "recasts", "explicit correction", "clarification requests", "metalinguistic feedback", "elicitation", and "repetition". When done properly, corrective feedback is delivered in two general forms: "on-the-spot" and "delayed feedback".

On-the-spot, feedback is used to remedy fossilization and old errors with the main goal of accuracy, whereas delayed feedback is delivered to improve accuracy while maintaining fluency. Choosing delayed or on the spot depends solely on what the student needs. The decision whether to correct mistakes immediately or after some time depends on various factors. These include aims, class dynamics, learner attitude and expectations, motivation, level, and the teacher's evaluation of whether a “mistake” or an “error” has been made.

On-the-spot correction

On-the-spot correction is when a teacher corrects a learner's mistake as soon as they make it. For example, the learner is telling the teacher about a hobby and says, “I am going every weekend”.

The teacher immediately responds with “I go every weekend”. It is important to note that on-the-spot correction should be used when the focus of correction is accuracy rather than fluency, or when the student is aware of the rule but makes mistakes due to habit, lack of attention, or fossilization.

Delayed correction

Delayed correction techniques are corrections a teacher uses some time after a learner has made an error. This is usually done to avoid interrupting fluency.

Delayed correction contrasts with correction techniques such as reformulation and echoing, which occur immediately, “on the spot”. For example, the teacher monitors closely as learners discuss a topic in groups, making a note of the most interesting/important errors. When the discussion finishes, the mistakes are discussed openly in class.

In the classroom

Teachers can use giving the correct answer, echoing the learner, and using facial expressions and gestures to indicate where the problem was in what the learner said. It is strongly recommended to encourage learners to correct their mistakes themselves.

If the student needs to improve his confidence in speaking, and speak faster and more fluently, using delayed feedback is recommended. If the student needs to know more about grammar structures and needs to improve accuracy in his speaking or use uncommon grammar or vocabulary, on-the-spot feedback is recommended. Giving corrective feedback whether on-the-spot or delayed comes in different types as listed below. Each type can be delivered either in on-the-spot or delayed form.

1. Explicit correction

Indicating that the student's utterance was incorrect. The teacher provides the correct form.

S: [...] I have breakfast this morning at 7 AM.

T: I **had** breakfast this morning at 7 AM.

2. Recast

Without directly indicating that the student's utterance was incorrect, the teacher implicitly reformulates the student's error or provides the correct form.

S: [...] I have breakfast this morning at 7 AM.

T: You **have** breakfast this morning at 7 AM?.

3. Clarification request

By using phrases like "Excuse me?" or "I don't understand," the teacher indicates that the message has not been understood or that the student's utterance contained some kind of mistake and that a repetition or a reformulation is required.

S: [...] I have breakfast this morning at 7 AM.

T: Pardon? I **have** breakfast this morning at 7 AM?.

4. Metalinguistic clues

Without providing the correct form, the teacher poses questions or provides comments or information related to the formation of the student's utterance (for example, "Do we say it like that?" "That's not how you say it in English.

S: [...] I have breakfast this morning at 7 AM.

T: Did you **have** breakfast in the morning or are you **having** breakfast now? Do we use **have** to talk about the past?

5. Elicitation

The teacher directly elicits the correct form from the student by asking questions (e.g., "What's the past form of have?"), by pausing to allow the student to complete the teacher's utterance (e.g., "It's had."), or by asking students to reformulate the utterance (e.g., "Say that again."). Elicitation questions differ from questions that are defined as metalinguistic clues in that they require more than a yes/no response.

S: [...] I have breakfast this morning at 7 AM.

T: Say that again, please. What's the past form of **have**?

Unit 1. Holidays



Photo from iStockphoto.com

Warm-up

Discuss the following questions as a class.

- What do you usually like to do when you get some time off school/work?
- When was the last time you went on vacation? Where did you go and what did you do?
- If you could travel right now, where would you go and what would you do?

A: Idea

Read the chart below and discuss the information in pairs.

Where Employees Have the Most and Least Holidays

Selected major cities by average paid vacation days



* Vacation days include paid vacation in 2018 only. Legal holidays are not included.

@StatistaCharts Source: UBS

statista

Discussion point

Discuss the following questions in a group and then share your ideas with the class.

1. Which countries offer a lot of holidays per year?
2. Which countries offer fewer holidays per year?
3. Do you know how many holidays you have in your country?
4. Do people get enough holidays in your country?
5. What are some advantages of having a lot of holidays in a country?
6. Can having too many holidays affect a country negatively? How?
7. If you had the power to change the law in your country, would you change the number of holidays?

Unit 20 Adoption



Photo from iStockphoto.com

Warm-up

Discuss the following questions as a class.

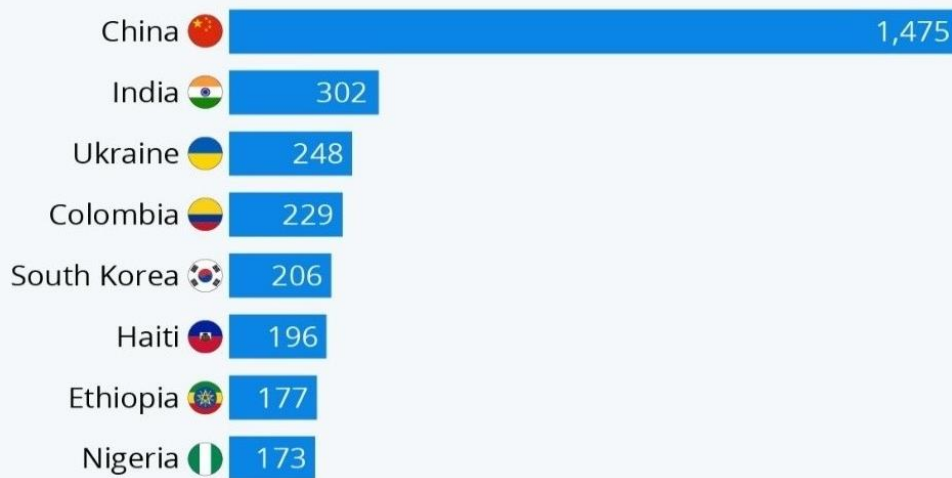
- What comes to your mind when you hear the word “adoption”?
- Do you know anyone with adopted children? Are they happy with their decision?
- Why do some people adopt children? What are some possible reasons?

A: Idea

Read the chart below and discuss the information in pairs.

Where Do U.S. Overseas Adoptees Come From?

Countries with the highest number of adoptions to the United States in FY 2018*



* latest available

Source: U.S. Department of State



statista

Discussion point

Discuss the following questions in a group and then share your ideas with the class.

1. Why do you think Americans go to other countries to adopt children?
2. Is it a good idea to adopt children from other countries?
3. Some people prefer adoption over having their own baby. What are some possible reasons for this preference?
4. Is adoption stigmatized in your country?

B: Opinion

Read the following opinion for comprehension.

Joy, choices, and qualms.



Photo by: Jovanna Tosello

New York Times: Adoption is a trauma. My 17-year-old daughter, born in the United States and adopted at birth, will tell you very clearly that adoption is a terrible thing. She is a happy, successful, well-adjusted kid who is also “killing it in her classes” (as Arthur C. Brooks says of his daughter). She loves us and we are her parents — and she still thinks adoption is a terrible thing.

Adoptive parents need to drop the idea that we are rescuing our kids. We need to do everything we can to keep them connected to their biological families, to raise them in communities where they will see themselves in the faces of others. If we really want to help children, we should support efforts for worldwide economic justice, public health improvements, and an American tax and welfare system that allows women to parent wanted children.

Read more:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/26/opinion/adoption-parents.html>

Your opinion

Express your own opinion about the text above.

1. Do you agree that adoption is a kind of trauma?
2. What can traumatize adopted children?
3. In what ways can adoptees benefit from being adopted?
4. Is adopting a human child different from adopting animals? In what way?



C: Thinking time

Discuss the following questions in a group and get ready for a debate.

1. What are some challenges associated with adoption?
2. Is it better to adopt an infant or an older child? Why?
3. Should you tell the child that he or she was adopted? If so, at what age?
4. Should adopted children have the right to spend time with their biological parents?
5. Is the real parent the birth parent or the adoptive parent?
6. Think of some reasons to have birth children and some other reasons to adopt a child?
7. Which is better for the world? Having a birth child or an adopted one?

Take sides

Some people choose not to have children. Instead, they choose to adopt an underprivileged child. Is it better to save an underprivileged child from a difficult life or is it better to bring your own child to this world? Take sides and brainstorm some reasons and ideas to defend your opinion.

Bring your own child to this world

Reason 1:.....

Reason 2:.....

Reason 3:.....

Adopt an underprivileged child

Reason 1:.....

Reason 2:.....

Reason 3:.....

Debate

Start a debate with a classmate from the opposite side and defend your opinion.

D: Task

Express your opinion about adoption and the extent to which you agree or disagree with it while recording your voice. Then, listen to the recording and try to identify and correct your mistakes. Do this task three times and try not to repeat your mistakes in the new recordings.

E: Mistakes log

Keep a record of your mistakes and try not to repeat them in the future. By logging your mistakes and knowing the underlying reason for each error, you will develop metalinguistic knowledge and awareness about your mistakes which in turn, leads to developing accuracy in speaking and speaking without error.

Mistake**Correct form****Reason**

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