

To stress or not to stress by Ian Pemberton

Age:	Teenagers / Adults
Level:	Advanced +
Time:	60 minutes
Objectives:	To identify emphasis; to consider why and how to emphasize words; to practise emphasizing words
Key skills:	Speaking (pronunciation)
Materials:	One copy of the worksheet per student; PowerPoint presentation (optional)

Note: This lesson is for students from C1 onwards. It can be used as a part of a general English course or with EAP students to teach presentation technique. It can be done with or without the PowerPoint presentation.

Preparation (optional)

Prior to the lesson, you may want to source photos of the celebrities in activity 1 on the worksheet to show students during the lesson.

Procedure

Objectives

Hand out the worksheet and/or show students slide 2 of the PowerPoint presentation. Ask three different students to read out the objectives. Correct their pronunciation if there are any issues.

Introduction

Introduce the topic (Shakespeare) gradually by revealing the dates 1564–1616 on slide 3 and asking students their significance. If they are unable to guess (answer: Shakespeare lived from 1564–1616), you can reveal the line drawing of Shakespeare as an additional clue. If you don't have the PowerPoint, you can begin by writing the dates on the board to see if the students can guess the significance.

Activity 1 – Who's who?

Ask students, working alone or in pairs or groups, to match the roles in the box with the people in the table. Use slide 4 to provide the answers.

Key:

actor	role
Paapa Essiedu	Shakespeare's Hamlet
Tim Minchin	Australian comedian
Benedict Cumberbatch	Sherlock Holmes
Harriet Walter	Lady Shackleton
David Tennant	Doctor Who
Rory Kinnear	Bill Tanner
Sir Ian McKellen	Gandalf
Dame Judy Dench	M (head of MI6)
Charles Windsor	the Prince of Wales

Activity 2 – Identifying emphasis

Show slide 5. Play the YouTube video (6 minutes 27) – youtu.be/kEs8rK5Cqt8. Students watch the video and underline, in the table from the previous activity, which word each speaker emphasizes most. Review the answers orally or using slide 6.

Activity 3 – Why we emphasize words

Go through the bullet points on the worksheet and/or slide 7 with the students. This is a very complex area of English but it has been simplified to draw attention to how we convey our attitude through emphasis and how we highlight things that we consider important for the listener to focus on. We actually emphasize using a moving tone – that is to say, there is a pitch change from low to high when we convey emotion or signal importance.

Activity 4 – Recite Shakespeare

This is mechanical practice stressing different words in the sentence using changes in loudness, duration and pitch (slide 4). With a genuinely advanced group, you could discuss meaning changes but any differences are quite subtle and difficult to articulate.

Activity 5 – Identifying meaning changes (1)

This is a matching activity (slide 9). Review orally or fade in the answers using slide 10.

Key: 1. c; 2. a; 3. f; 4. b; 5. e; 6. d; 7. g

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Activity 6 – Identifying meaning changes (2)

This is a less controlled activity than the last one and it requires some critical thinking. Students need to consider how the meaning changes in each case. After you have reviewed the answers with the class, orally or fading in slide 11, students work in pairs to practise emphasizing different words in the sentence.

Outcomes

Ask the students to reflect on the lesson objectives (slide 12), then put them into pairs and get them to explain the statements. Depending on time, you can also conduct a whole-class review where you nominate individual students to provide the answers.

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Objectives

1. Identify emphasis
2. Consider why and how to emphasize words
3. Practise emphasizing words

Activity 1 – Who's who?

How much do you know about British popular culture? Match the individuals with their roles.

Sherlock Holmes

Lady Shackleton in *Downton Abbey*

Doctor Who

Bill Tanner (MI6 chief of staff) in *James Bond*

Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*

M (head of MI6) in *James Bond*

the Prince of Wales

actor	role	word emphasized
Paapa Essiedu	Shakespeare's Hamlet	To be or not to be: that is the question.
Tim Minchin	Australian comedian	To be or not to be: that is the question.
Benedict Cumberbatch		To be or not to be: that is the question.
Harriet Walter		To be or not to be: that is the question.
David Tennant		To be or not to be: that is the question.
Rory Kinnear		To be or not to be: that is the question.
Sir Ian McKellen		To be or not to be: that is the question.
Dame Judy Dench		To be or not to be: that is the question.
Charles Windsor		To be or not to be: that is the question.

Activity 2 – Identifying emphasis

Watch the video and underline, in the table from activity 1, which word each speaker emphasizes most.

Activity 3 – Why we emphasize words

- We emphasize words for a variety of reasons. These include expressing our feelings and indicating the importance of words in the sentence to the listener(s).
- We can emphasize a word by making it longer, louder or by saying it in a different tone.
- Choosing which word to emphasize can alter the meaning of the sentence.

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Activity 4 – Recite Shakespeare

Work with a partner. Practise stressing the different words in the sentence.

1. To **BE** or not to be: that is the question
2. To be **OR** not to be: that is the question
3. To be or **NOT** to be: that is the question
4. To be or not to **BE**: that is the question
5. To be or not to be: **THAT** is the question
6. To be or not to be: that **IS** the question
7. To be or not to be: that is **THE** question
8. To be or not **TO** be: that is the question
9. To be or not to be: that is the **QUESTION**

Activity 5 – Identifying meaning (1)

Match the emphasized sentences with their meanings.

1. I asked you to buy me a bottle of sparkling water.
 2. I **ASKED** you to buy me a bottle of sparkling water.
 3. I asked **YOU** to buy me a bottle of sparkling water.
 4. I asked you to buy **ME** a bottle of sparkling water.
 5. I asked you to buy me a **BOTTLE** of sparkling water.
 6. I asked you to buy me a bottle of **SPARKLING** water.
 7. I asked you to buy me a bottle of sparkling **WATER**.
- a. not told you
 - b. The water was for me.
 - c. You weren't asked by somebody else.
 - d. not still water
 - e. not a glass
 - f. I didn't ask him.
 - g. not wine

Activity 6 – Identifying meaning (2)

In pairs, discuss the meanings of these sentences. Practise saying them with a partner.

	sentence	meaning
1.	SHE isn't flying to Glasgow tomorrow.	
2.	She ISN'T flying to Glasgow tomorrow.	
3.	She isn't FLYING to Glasgow tomorrow.	
4.	She isn't flying TO Glasgow tomorrow.	
5.	She isn't flying to GLASGOW tomorrow.	
6.	She isn't flying to Glasgow TOMORROW .	

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Outcomes

1. Read through the statements and think about what you can and can't do well. If necessary, review the materials.
2. Explain the answers to 1. and 2. below to your partner. Listen to your partner tell you the answers.

I am able to explain ...

1. why speakers of English emphasize words.
2. how to emphasize words in a sentence.