

Chapter Two

Hearing grammar

Grammar focus. Grammatical and focus stress, parts of speech and phrases

Introduction.

People learn a new language only if their mind interacts with it. That interaction can be the result of reading, writing, listening, or speaking. Most people learn English by interacting with the spoken version. For the children of native speakers, this poses few problems since they hear several versions of the language as they do activities with their parents and others. For example, their parents probably use careful pronunciation when reading stories or when they are angry and are giving instructions for the nth time. The children have also learned the more careful pronunciation of music and children's television shows. They have also practiced the less careful pronunciation of conversational English. In any case they have learned that the rhythm of the language is closely connected to the meaning and the grammar of the sentences they are hearing. Let's do an awareness activity to see how this works.

Awareness Activity 2.1. Hearing grammar.

Read the following sentences to yourself and mark which words or parts of words seem to have the heaviest beat or stress. You may even hear your voice rise to a higher musical pitch on these beats.

1. John bought an expensive, new car.
2. He paid cash for it.

3. He's been driving it everywhere.
4. The gas mileage is horrible but he loves it.
5. You can see it outside in the street right now.

Were your results something like the following? The words or syllables with heavier stress are written in capital letters.

1. JOHN BOUGHT an exPENsive, NEW CAR.
2. He PAID CASH for it.
3. He's been DRIVing it EVerywhere.
4. The GAS MILEAge is HORRible but he LOVES it.
5. You can SEE it outSIDE in the STREET RIGHT NOW.

Notice how the heavy beat falls on the words that tell the listener the action or what is happening (*bought, paid, driving, see*), *who* or *what* is involved in the action (*John, car, cash, mileage*), *what kind of things are involved* (*expensive, new, gas, horrible*) and *where* (*everywhere, outside, street*) or *when* (*right now*) it happened. The grammatical names for these pieces of information are **verbs** (what is happening), **nouns** (who or what is involved), **adjectives** (what kind of things are involved), and **adverbs** (where and when). These are also called the **content words** because they carry the basic meaning of the sentence. When English speakers talk to each other, they draw attention to these content words by placing a heavier stress on them. These content words are unlimited in number. English has hundreds of thousands of them. Learning these words is a life long activity.

Take a look at the words that did not carry this heavier stress. These are sometimes called **function words**, **structure words**, or **grammatical words**. In this text we will call them **function words**. They are limited in number but are very frequent in occurrence. Rather than carry the basic meaning of the sentence, they indicate how the information expressed by the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs relate to or function in regards to each other in the grammatical structure of the discourse, hence their name. They also come in different grammatical categories. Let's take a closer look.

1. JOHN BOUGHT an expENsive, NEW CAR.
2. He PAID CASH for it.
3. He's been DRIVing it EVerywhere.
4. The GAS MILEage is HORRible but he LOVES it.
5. You can SEE it outSIDE in the STREET RIGHT NOW.

The *an* and *the* in sentences 1, 4, and 5 are in the category called **determiners**. Determiners draw attention to upcoming nouns and indicate how they are related to earlier information about the subject. In sentence 1 *an* tells us that the car hasn't yet been mentioned. The *the* in 4 tell us that car has just one gas mileage and the *the* in 5 tells us that we know which street we are talking about. The *he*, *it*, and *you* in sentences 2, 3, 4, and 5 are **pronouns** and indicate that the information they represent has already been expressed or can be inferred from the context. The role that pronouns and determiners play as markers in the flow of information in a conversation is the subject of a later chapter. The *for* and *in* of sentences 2 and 5 are **prepositions**. Prepositions

most commonly are used with nouns or pronouns to indicate to the listener that they are functioning as adverbs indicating when, where, how, or why the action is taking place. In this case *for* indicates *why* the money was paid, *in* indicates *where* the car is.

The *but* in sentence 4 is a **conjunction**. It connects two pieces of information and in this case indicates that there is an unexpected contrast. The ‘*s* *been* and *can* of sentences 3 and 5 are **auxiliary verbs**. In the same way that determiners combine with nouns to indicate how the nouns relate to earlier information, auxiliary verbs indicate how the action of the verb relates to the meaning expressed in the rest of the discourse. For example, when did the action happen or how likely is it that the action happened. The ‘*s* *been* in sentence 3 tells us the driving started in the past and is continuing. The *can* of 5 tells us that the act of seeing is possible.

Traditionally grammarians call these different categories of content and function words **parts of speech**. This placement of stress to differentiate the parts of speech according to content and function words is called **grammatical stress**.

Awareness Activity 2.2 Surprises with grammatical stress

Sometimes stress in English not only differentiates content from function words but also differentiates nouns from verbs and adjective and noun combinations from compound nouns. In the following sentences, mark where the heaviest stress or beat is in the highlighted words.

1. The *rebels* continued to *rebel* against the authorities.

2. The *produce* in this section are *produced* in the wintertime
3. The *object* of this discussion is not to *object* to everything.
4. When we *contrast* both sides the *contrasts* are evident.
5. The British were called *red coats* because they wore *red coats*..
6. *Bluebirds* are not always blue, but a *blue bird* is.
7. The clowns at the *big top* were playing with *big tops*.

Did you notice that the when “rebel,” “produce,” “object,” and “contrast” are nouns, the stress is on the first syllable, when verbs, the second. Thought this is a general pattern, it isn’t always true. For example “contact,” “preview,” and “control” have the same stress whether used as a noun or a verb.

8. Our contacts contacted us.
9. They previewed the previews.
10. The army controls the emergency controls..

When adjective and noun combinations such as “red coat,” “bluebird,” and “big top” as serving as compounds, the heaviest stress is on the first word to indicate that the two words are serving together as a noun. Sometimes they are written as one word, sometimes as two. However, if the first word is serving as an adjective describing the noun, there is a heavy stress is on both words. Thus a RED coat is a British soldier but a RED COAT is a coat that is red. A BLUEbird is a type of bird but a BLUE BIRD is a bird that is blue. A BIG top is a circus tent but a BIG TOP is a large toy. Likewise, which is more likely driven by a mother taking children to a soccer practice, a MOVing van or a MOVing VAN? The second, of course. The first is used to move furniture rather than people. Which of the

following is more likely a comment said when a tornado passes through? “Did you see the HOUSE FLY?” or “Did you see the HOUSE fly?” The first one has a flying house, the second an insect.

Awareness Activity 2.3 Predicting function words

Function words are usually so predictable from context that in journalism they are often left out in want ads or headlines. For example a headline might read “Winning streak boosted rating for trivia show,” rather than “The winning streak has boosted the rating for the trivia show.” A want ad might read “Hot tub 5 person cabinet lights never used,” rather than “A hot tub for five persons with cabinet lights. It has never been used.” We also tend to leave function words out when writing notes to ourselves, as in “check mail” rather than “check for the mail.” Read the following two sentences from an introductory email that is making a genealogical inquiry. All the function words have been omitted. Can you replace them?

1. Gunzler unusual name surprised see reference genealogy
2. ancestor Anna married Karl 1867 coming America 1865.

Did you get the following or something similar?

1. Gunzler *is such an* unusual name *that I was* surprised *to see your* reference *to it in your* genealogy.
2. *My* ancestor Anna married Karl *in* 1867 *after coming to* America *in* 1865.

This ability to supply missing function words comes from our knowledge of **expectancy grammar**. In other words, we know how the structure words fit into the grammar of the sentence based on the flow of information given by the

nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. When our ear hears the stressed words in a sentence, our brain predicts what other words are expected in the sequence even though we might not hear them or pay attention to them because they are unstressed.

Grammar.

When English speakers receive messages from each other, they expect the information to flow in a certain order. For example, they expect to hear first who or what is doing the action. This is traditionally called the **subject** or **S**. Then they expect to hear what the action is, in other words the **verb** or **V**. This might be followed by who or what the action is happening to, in other words the **object** or **O**. Thus English has an **SVO** flow of information as in

The boy threw the ball.

As we can see from the sample sentence, the subject and the object are more than **nouns**. They include all the words in the phrase (*the boy, the ball*) that indicate who or what is involved with the action.

We could add more information about what kinds of people or things are involved. We expect this information to be located just ahead of the noun, as in

The *young* boy threw the *yellow* ball.

These words that indicate what kind of a person or thing is involved are called **adjectives**. This position before the noun where they are usually found in a sentence is called the adjective or the **attributive** position. We will look at adjectives in more detail in another chapter. When you read the sentence out loud to yourself, notice how all the words that are serving as the subject or the

object are said together. Notice too that although you can pause before or after the group of words acting as the subject or the object, a pause after any of the words within the group sounds as though you haven't decided what to say. (e.g. "theyoung boy" or "the young....boy"). These groups of words that act together as a unit are called **phrases**. In this case we would call the phrases **noun phrases** or **nominals** since the words act together as a noun. Notice that in a phrase, the last word has the heaviest beat or stress and marks the end of the phrase.

We could also tell more about the action of the sentence, perhaps indicating when, where, why or how the action took place, as in

The young boy threw the ball *outside*.

Outside tells us where the action took place and is called an **adverb**. Adverbs are usually found at the end of the sentence, though they can appear before the verb or even at the first of the sentence, as in "The young boy *sometimes* threw the ball" or "*Quickly* the young boy threw the ball." In the same way that groups of words can act as nouns in a noun phrase, groups of words can act as **adverb phrases** or **adverbials**, as in

The young boy threw the ball *very hard*.

The adverb phrase *very hard* tells us how he threw the ball. We will look at the structure of adverbs and adverbials in more detail in a later chapter, but let us take a quick look at a special type of phrase, the **prepositional phrase**, that allows nouns or noun phrases to serve as adverbials. Notice how in the following

sentence, the nouns *park* and *lunch* do not tell us who or what is involved in the action but indicate where and when the action took place.

After lunch the young boy threw the ball *in the park*.

The prepositions *after* and *in* tell the listener that the nouns in this case represent times and places rather than subjects and objects. Notice too that when you read the sentence aloud, the stress pattern and the places you can pause indicate to the listener how the words group together in phrases.

After LUNCH || the YOUNG BOY || THREW || the BALL || in the PARK ||

The prepositions signal to the listener that the upcoming nouns are not the subject or the object in the sentence.

Let's look at several sentences from a newspaper to review what we expect when we hear an English sentence and how the function words interact with the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to manage the flow of information. Let's look at these sentences one or two at a time. First notice how the stress patterns and the phrases draw attention to the content words.

- FANS WATCHED the SHOW with GLEE.
- Those FLOWers inSPIRED a POet in a FLANders CEMetery.

In the first two sentences, the expected SVO order is followed. The first stressed word (*fans, flowers*) is the noun functioning as the subject, the next stressed word (*watched, inspired*) is the action. The following stressed word (*show, poet*) is the object affected by the action. Some of the stressed words (*show, flowers, poet*) combine with unstressed function words (*the, those, a*) to form phrases. In these cases the function words warn the reader that a noun is

coming up. Both sentences end in nouns (*glee, cemetery*) that are functioning as adverbs rather than subjects or objects. Prepositions (*with, in*) signal to the listener or reader that this is so, in the first case indicating that the following phrase indicates *how* it was done, the second indicating *where* it was done. In the last prepositional phrase the listener hears two stressed words in a row following the word *a*, indicating that the first stressed word is an adjective describing the noun that follows.

The next sentence also follows SVO order but the stress pattern is different.

- She PAINTed iMAGinary FACes.

The first stress is on the verb. However, in order to maintain the SVO order that is expected in English, an unstressed pronoun (*she*) is in the S position, reminding the listener or reader that the identity of the S is already known. The last two words are stressed in a phrase in the O position, indicating that the first one is describing the noun that follows since that is the expected order.

The next three sentences do not follow the expected SVO order, indicating that something special is going on.

- On the TRILLer FRONT, a WRONG NUMber SENDS CHRIS on a HIGH-stakes CHASE.

In the first we hear a phrase at the beginning of the sentence that contains two stressed words introduced by an unstressed *the*, indicating that an adjective-noun combination (*thriller front*) follow. However, to signal to the listener that this noun phrase is not the S of the sentence even though it is at the beginning, the

phrase is introduced by a preposition (*on*). The *a* following the prepositional phrase signals that the real S is coming up. The stress pattern in the phrase indicates that this S has an adjective-noun combination (*wrong number*). The stressed words continue the expected VO sequence. The unstressed preposition (*on*) indicates that the following noun phrase is not the S or O of the sentence but is an adverbial indicating *where* the action is taking place.

The first word in the next sentence is a stressed word (*contact*) denoting the action of the sentence.

- CONTACT us if you NEED inforMAtion.

Normally a noun phrase or a pronoun appears in the S position. Hearing the verb first indicates to the listener that this is a special condition. In this case the sentence is a command. As expected, the pronoun in the O position is unstressed. This is followed by an unstressed conjunction (*if*) indicating that another sentence follows. However, the *if* indicates that the following sentence is an adverbial telling *why* or *when* to do the action. Notice how the sentence following the *if* follows the expected SVO conditions.

The last sentence follows the expected SVO order with unstressed pronouns marking the S and O positions.

- Can you BEAT him?

However, an unstressed auxiliary verb (*can*) appears at the first of the sentence, indicating a special condition. In this case the signal is that the following is a question. Notice that a stressed verb at the beginning signals a command, an unstressed auxiliary verb or operator signals a question.

Pragmatics and discourse.

So far we have looked at individual sentences. However, when we use English to communicate with each other, sentences usually do not occur in isolation. Two problems arise in the course of a conversation that we want to take a moment to look at, focus stress and the salience of function words.

Focus stress. We have already looked at how English draws attention to the meaning of a sentence by placing stress on the content words. In addition, English puts a heavier stress with a rise in pitch on the word that is the focus or what the speaker feels is the most important information. Because this information is usually towards the end of a phrase or a sentence, we call this **end focus**. Let's look again at the five sentences in AA 2.1. We've already seen how content words rather than the function words are stressed. However, read the sentences again and note how the heaviest beat is on a word near the end of the sentence drawing attention to the information of that word. Not only is the beat stronger but the voice rises and then falls to a lower pitch until the end of the sentence in what is called a rising-falling intonation pattern. If the focus word is only one syllable long, the rising-falling slides through that syllable. Otherwise, the focus word has a raised pitch and the following words have a lower pitch.

1. John bought an expensive, new CAR.
2. He paid CASH for it.
3. He's been driving it EVerywhere.
4. The gas mileage is HORrible but he LOVES it.
5. You can see it outside in the street right NOW.

Notice that sentence 4 is really a combination of two sentences joined together with *but*. Each sentence has its own end focus.

This end focus with its heavier beat and rising falling intonation is fairly simple to learn in sentences in isolation. However, notice what happens in a conversation as the speaker uses this pattern to focus attention on information in other parts of a sentence. Read the conversation and note where the heavier beat with the rising-falling intonation is located.

Mary: I've lost my umbrella.

Anne: What kind of umbrella.

Mary: It was a small collapsible one.

Anne. What color was it?

Mary: It was green.

Anne: What kind of handle did it have?

Mary: A duck head handle.

Anne: Oh, I saw it under your desk.

Mary: On my desk?

Anne: No, under your desk.

I've marked the syllable that has the heaviest beat with the rising-falling pattern for emphasis. Notice how after the focus word the rest of the sentence is said at a lower pitch.

Mary: I've lost my umbBRELLa.

Anne: What KIND of umbrella.

Mary: It was a small collAPsible one.

Anne. What COLor was it?

Mary: It was GREEN.

Anne: What kind of HANDle did it have?

Mary: A DUCK head handle.

Anne: Oh, I saw it under your DESK.

Mary: ON my desk?

Anne: No, UNDER your desk.

Notice that our rule of thumb of putting stresses on the content words with the heaviest stress being on the last stressed word of the sentence or phrase doesn't work in this discourse context. In English, we expect end focus with the new information at the end of the sentence. However, sometimes in conversation the focus stress is placed on an earlier content word if that is the new information. In the last two sentences in the conversation, focus stress was even put on function words (*on, under*) rather than content words to focus attention to them. This use of focus stress to draw attention to unexpected parts of the sentence is called **contrastive stress**.

Saliency of function words. In AA 2.3 we saw how, as fluent speakers of English, we can predict missing function words in headlines, want ads, and messages by using our expectancy grammar. We use our expectancy grammar every day in conversation to supply missing words. Read the following conversation out loud. Can you supply the missing words?

Bill: Where ya goin'?

Joe: D'store.

Bill: How ya gettin' ere?

Joe: M takina bus.

Bill: Ja geme sa milk?

Joe: Glada.

Were these your results?

Bill: Where are you going?

Joe: To the store.

Bill: How are you getting there?

Joe: I'm taking the/a bus.

Bill: Would you get me some milk?

Joe: I'd be glad to.

Notice how many of the function words are missing, are contracted, or are ambiguous. You can see why people who have learned "book English" and have not developed their expectancy grammar have problems with English conversation. The predictable function words are missing. Only the content words are clearly said.

This can also cause problems for those who are learning English on the streets. Unless someone is reading to them at home or is otherwise directing careful speech to them, they do not hear the function words. When they come to school, the grammar that they heard on the streets does not match the grammar they meet in the classroom. The problems that this mismatch of conversational and academic English causes for English language learners will be a major

concern as we look at the various parts of speech in more detail in the following chapters.

Reflections.

Some concepts.

- The stress pattern in spoken English indicates to the listener how the meaning relates to the grammar of an utterance.
- Words are grouped together in phrases that perform a similar grammatical function.
- Some grammatical features are difficult to discern in the spoken language.

Some key terminology.

- **adjectives**—content words that indicate what kinds of things are in the activity, e.g. green, happy, wide
- **adverbs**—content words that indicate when, where, why, or how something happened
- **auxiliary verbs**—also called helping verbs. Function words which combine with verbs to indicate when the activity took place or the likelihood of its happening, e.g. may, have, will
- **conjunctions**—function words that connect two pieces of information, e.g. and, or, but, if
- **content words**—the words that carry the basic meaning of the sentence, e.g. verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs
- **contrastive stress**—placement of the focus stress in an unexpected part of the sentence, perhaps even on a function word

- **determiners**—function words that precede nouns and indicate how they relate to earlier information or the general context, e.g. the, a, that, this, my, his
- **end focus**—in English the new information, and thus the focus stress, is usually at the end of the sentence
- **expectancy grammar**—since the order of information in English sentences has an expected order, and phrases have a predictable structure, listeners can usually supply function words that might be missing or inaudible in a conversation
- **focus stress**—the strongest or heaviest beat in a sentence indicating the new information the speaker wants the listener to pay attention to
- **function words**—sometimes called structure or grammar words. They indicate how the information expressed by the content words relates to or functions in regards to other information in the sentence or general context, e.g. determiners, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs
- **grammatical stress**—the beat or rhythm that indicates where the content words are in an utterance
- **nouns**—content words that indicate who or what is involved in the activity, e.g. house, cow, grass
- **parts of speech**—the grammatical categories of words in a language
- **phrases**—groups of function and content words acting together as a unit, usually marked with the heaviest stress on the last word of the phrase

- **prepositions**—function words used with nouns and pronouns, usually to indicate that the noun is serving as an adverb, e.g. in the garden
- **pronouns**—function words that indicate that the information expressed by the noun has already been given or can be determined by the context, e.g. he, she, I, we
- **SVO**—subject, verb, object. The expected order of information in an English sentence
- **verbs**—content words that indicate an activity, e.g. swim, think

Rules of thumb: Basic principles for placing stress

1. Identify the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs with a beat or stress. (e.g. I'm *leaving* for *England* *tomorrow*. My *goal* is to *find* a *good* *room*.)
2. Place the heaviest beat and highest pitch or focus stress on the new information that you want to emphasize. (e.g. I'm leaving for **ENGLAND** tomorrow. My goal is to find a good **ROOM**.)

Some Reflective Activities.

1. Not every language expects the information in an utterance to be in an SVO order. Japanese has a SOV order with the S often not expressed because it is understood by the context. Tagalog usually has a VSO order. What other word orders have you encountered in your studies of other languages?

Reflecting on your own trouble in learning these languages, how might these alternate orders of information cause trouble for someone learning to converse in English?

2. What rules of thumb were broken in the following sentences?

*Swimming I in the lake was.

*Janie threw her clubs the lake.

*Am sitting in the car now.

3. If you are having trouble hearing the beat and the stresses in English, you might try reading poetry. Read aloud the following from “Sea Fever” by John Masefield and note how the poet has carefully chosen the sequence of words so that the stress patterns and rhythm give the reader the feeling of being at sea and feeling the waves and the wind. Sometimes the poet has chosen to put too stressed syllable together. As you match this rhythm with the meaning, what is the effect?

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel’s kick and the wind’s song and the white sail’s shaking.
And a gray mist on the sea’s face, and a gray dawn breaking.

4. The way we use stress in English is difficult for many English language learners. Contrastive stress in particular causes problems. Have a native speaker of Spanish who has not lived in the United States so long that English has influenced their Spanish read the following Spanish sentence. Take note of where the beats or stresses are.

¿Quiere un cuarto con comidas o sin comidas?

Now say the English translation and note where the heaviest stresses are.

Do you want a room with meals or without meals?

In Spanish were the stresses on 'comidas' (meals) whereas in English they were on the prepositions 'with' and 'without'? If you know people who speak other languages, compare contrastive stress with those languages too.

5. Say the following sentences to yourself and mark the words that have a beat.

Then for each word with a stress ask yourself the questions who, what, where, when, why, how, what kind of, and what's happening to identify the nouns (who, what), verbs (what's happening), adjectives (what kind of), and adverbs (where, when, why, how).

We bought a better car.

Open the door to the garden.

You always carry a big umbrella.

Octavio came late.

6. As you read the following sentences from an advertisement, mark your stresses and intonation (the highest pitch in the phrase) to identify where the focus stress is. Do the principles of end focus apply? Are there alternate ways that focus stress could be applied to draw attention to different bits of information?

We're here for you.

We know you face many obstacles and we want to help you.

Please contact us if you have difficulty with your coverage.

We want to help you gain access to the health care you need.

7. How can the following sentences be said with different stress patterns to mean different things?

We were lucky to find it in the dark room.

He lives in the white house.

Those really are cheap skates.

They sent him to the big house.

I couldn't find the blue print.

Grammar detective 2. Hearing grammar

Since comic strips are based on conversational English, they can be a good source for examples of spoken English. Let's listen to what grammar sounds like in comic strips.

Instructions:

1. On the Internet or in a newspaper find a comic strip that has a conversation in the panels. Print or cut out a copy.
2. Attach the strip to the top of a sheet of paper and copy the text in the space below the strip.
3. Read the strip out loud and mark where the stresses or beats are. Which words seem to have the highest pitch?
4. Look at the stressed words and then using questions words such as who and what for nouns (N), when, where, why, and how for adverbs (Adv), what kind of for adjectives (Adj) , and what's happening for verbs (V), determine the part of speech of the stressed words.
5. Analyze what you have found. Are the stresses placed according to principles of grammar (i.e. on N, V, Adj, Adv). How did the principle of end

focus work? Was the highest pitch towards the end of the sentence or was the focus drawn to pronouns, helping verbs, articles, and other function words?

6. Be ready to share your cartoon and your findings with your classmates.

Teaching ideas.

1. **Making sentences.** Cut out a picture from an advertisement that has lots of action. Make a short list of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs suggested by the picture. Ask the students to create sentences based on the picture and the content words you have supplied. Of course they have to supply the necessary function words.
2. **Singing a song.** Music is a good way to help students get a feeling for the stress patterns and the rhythm that are so important in English. There are many CDs of children's songs available. Perhaps have a song of the week that you play before class as a preclass activity. Then integrate the song into the activities for the week to teach listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. By the end of the week they will be humming and singing the song, all the while practicing the stress patterns of English.
3. **I'm hiding.** To help students work with how prepositions change nouns into adverbials of location, play this game. Whoever is "it" looks around the room and thinks of a location to pretend to hide in. It might be under the table, in the trashcan, behind the TV. The person then tells the class,
"I'm hiding, I'm hiding, but no one knows where. All you can see is my eyes and my hair. Where am I?"

The other students then take turns asking questions that can be answered yes or no to determine where the person is hiding. (e.g. Are you in the front of the room? Are you up high? Are you under a chair?) Whoever guesses where the person is pretending to be hiding is the next person "it." The teacher might model the game the first time.

4. **Daily dramatic reading.** In a dramatic reading words are said carefully with stresses on words clearly pronounced. You can use the techniques of dramatic reading to reinforce English rhythm and stress patterns by having the class adopt a favorite comic strip character. Every day assign different students play the characters in the strip that appeared that day or the day before. You might have them practice with you before class to make sure that the stress and intonation patterns are correct and that the reading truly is dramatic.