



# Instructional design in a business English context

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This paper describes how an instructional design (ID) approach to curriculum and activity development is being used in a Business English program at a private university in western Japan. A general overview of ID is provided with historical developments, key concepts, and recent trends. Two influential ID models are introduced to highlight important curricular considerations: Dick and Carey (1996) as well as Morrison, Ross, and Kemp (2004). Readers are asked to explore the merits of including a return-on-investment (ROI) perspective in the evaluation of university courses. As institutions strive to distinguish themselves and better serve the needs of their students, the business community, and society, business English and other ESP courses will continue to draw interest. To meet the increased demands and higher expectations we need to become more accountable. From this perspective, we should be preparing ourselves with effective instructional design (ID), clear instructional objectives and relevant evaluation schemes.

この論文ではインストラクショナルデザイン(ID)のプロセスがどのようにある大学のビジネス英語のプログラムを開発するのに使われているか概略を述べている。IDの簡単な概要について歴史的発展、主要概念、よく使われているデザインモデルと最近の発展とともに紹介している。IDプロセスの各段階を考えながら、このビジネス英語プログラムがどのように開発されたかマクロ(カリキュラム)とミクロ(作業)の両面からを説明している。著者は最後に言語教育の分野での近い将来期待できる変化について述べている。

**C**ompetition continues to intensify among universities in Japan to attract prospective students and maintain viability despite a general tendency toward declining applicant numbers. One strategy has been to add specialty courses in a variety of fields and the English language curriculum is no exception. A quick perusal of syllabi from various institutions turns up English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses aimed at developing language proficiency for a wide variety of contexts including the travel industry, health-care, engineering and business, to name just a few. Questions arise, though, regarding the

level of planning for these curriculums, how effective the implementation of individual courses is, and what return on investment institutions are achieving.

This paper offers the argument that a sound instructional design (ID) process can be used to address all these questions and better ensure that the time and energy spent on these courses is not wasted. To support this argument, a description is offered of how an instructional design (ID) process is being used to develop the business English program at a private university in western Japan. A brief overview of ID (and the related field of instructional technology) is presented together with historical developments, key concepts, influential design models, and recent developments. Using a generic ID model, each phase of the process is then described as it relates to developing the business English program at both the macro (curriculum) and micro (activity/task) levels. The paper concludes with some anticipated changes in our field and some new perspectives are offered to meet the various challenges accompanying these changes.

### Overview

Instructional design is a major sub field in an area of inquiry called instructional technology (IT) or educational technology (ET), which is concerned with various aspects of learning and how to best plan instruction to meet specific needs in schools, the workplace and other training settings. IT is mainly concerned with bringing together what we know about learning with the most appropriate media for delivering instruction. This field should be of interest to administrators, instructional planners, classroom instructors, corporate trainers, materials writers, and other related

professionals. Important considerations in IT include (1) theories that best explain how learning occurs, (2) existing and emerging media and technologies that best promote learning in specific contexts, and (3) essential elements in the instructional design process. Seels and Richey (1994) offer the following succinct definition of IT, “Instructional technology is the theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management and evaluation of processes and resources for learning.”

Historically, the field of IT developed from conceptual foundations set down by early educators and thinkers such as Johann Comenius, Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel and Johann Herbart (see, for example Saettler, 1990). Edward Thorndike is often credited for advancing education as a science, while B. F. Skinner is recognized as the father of behaviorism as an influential psychological theory of learning. Later contributions to IT were programmed instruction (maximizing learning through careful control of reinforcement for desired behavior) and the idea that complex tasks should be broken down into constituent steps. Other more recent developments include cognitive theories of learning, increasing interest in applying constructivist principles as espoused by Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner to instructional design, increasing attention to individual learning differences and the work of Robert Glaser (instructional systems and criterion-referenced measures) and Robert Gagne (learning objectives) (see, for example, Shrock, 1995).

The above conceptual developments were accompanied by technological developments and increasing emphasis on communication. Photography, the stereograph, slide projectors and other media gave rise to the “visual

instruction” or “visual education” boom in the early 1900s, but it was the demand for trained military personnel during WWII that spurred on the use of various audio-visual media, especially instructional films.

The influence of computers and related developments on IT is of course deep and far ranging. Reiser (2002) notes a major shift in attention toward computer-based instruction and developing new models of instructional design to take advantage of the interactive, computational, and communicative capabilities of computers. He also notes that instructional media has traditionally been viewed as a supplement to instruction and the teacher. The trend is slowly shifting towards using technology and instructional materials as an integral part of learning and in some cases in place of an instructor.

Together, these conceptual and technological developments have spurred the growth and diversification of the field of IT. It has also been recognized that professionals in the field need to be aware of the changing needs brought on by the new information driven economy. Increasing emphasis will be placed on pragmatic solutions.

Interested readers can find out more about IT and related topics via the ISD Related References and Recommended Readings at <[userpages.umbc.edu/~cursone/isd\\_ref.htm](http://userpages.umbc.edu/~cursone/isd_ref.htm)>.

### ID Models

Several ID models have been developed and promoted to meet the needs of specific teaching and training contexts, including the field of language instruction (see, for example, Brown, 1995).

One of the most influential and enduring generic models to date is ADDIE (short for Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate). Most other ID models are built up around these core components. ADDIE is most often represented as a linear process moving from one phase to the next (Fig. 1).

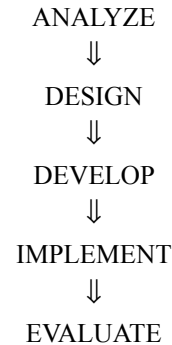


Figure 1. Common linear depiction of the ADDIE process.

More dynamic representations include the components arranged in a circle, highlighting the cyclical nature of the process (i.e. the whole process begins anew after evaluation), or having evaluation placed in the center and linked to all other components. For brevity sake, I will limit my discussion of other ID models to those proposed by Dick and Carey (1996), as well as Morrison, Ross, and Kemp (2004).

The Dick and Carey model includes major refinements such as the inclusion of the following components:

1. Identify instructional goals
2. Identify entry behaviors
3. Write performance goals
4. Develop criterion test items
5. Revise instruction (connected to all other core components)

Additionally, this model distinguishes between formative and summative evaluation. Readers will recognize though that these additional elements still fit within the ADDIE framework.

One other ID model that deserves attention in our field is the Morrison, Ross, and Kemp (2004) model, which starts with instructional problems and includes consideration of learner characteristics early in the ID cycle. This model also includes project management as part of the ID process. The essence of ID is summed up nicely in their seven basic premises (Fig. 2).

1. The instructional design process requires attention to both a systematic procedure and specificity for treating details within the plan.
2. The instructional design process usually starts at the course development level.
3. An instructional design plan is developed primarily for use by the instructional designer and planning team.
4. While planning, every effort should be made to provide for a level of satisfactory achievement for all learners.
5. The success of the instructional product is dependent on the accuracy of the information flowing into the instructional design process.
6. The instructional design process focuses on the individual rather than the content.
7. There is no single best way to design instruction.

**Figure 2. Premises underlying the instructional design process (Morrison, Ross & Kemp 2004)**

### ID and Business English

The following discussion highlights key elements of ID process as it is being used in the Business English program for the Faculty of Economics at a private university in western Japan. The Business English program is offered as an elective course in both the Economics and International Economics sections in this department. The four levels are Elementary Business English I and II, and Intermediate Business English I and II. The requirements for Elementary Business English are sophomore standing and a passing grade in the general English course (*sogo eigo*). The only additional requirement for Intermediate Business English is a passing grade in Elementary Business English. Classes for each of the four levels meet for 90 minutes once a week for fifteen weeks.

The ADDIE model has provided an adequate framework for initiating the project. Each phase is discussed in turn.

### *Analysis*

This phase has required a great deal of time and energy. Thus far we have attempted to compile a list of exit-level competencies that students should be able to demonstrate upon completion of each level of Business English. At the same time, we have tried to measure the capabilities of the average student entering our program and clarify what needs (individual, institutional, and societal) the program is intended to fulfill. Analysis has included a review of relevant literature (especially regarding English for specific purposes [ESP], vocabulary acquisition, and communication strategies), interviews with business English and curriculum design specialists, classroom observation notes, survey instruments with follow up interviews, and standardized test scores. In this way, we are beginning to understand the performance gap that exists and areas where we should focus our attention. We believe a well-designed and thorough analysis will better ensure that we are meeting the needs of all stakeholders and making best use of our limited resources.

One major point that has surfaced in our analysis is the lack of work experience on the part of many of our learners. This poses a major challenge in terms of establishing relevancy. Other important considerations include the learning environment at our school in general and these classes in particular, and the importance of understanding individual learner characteristics and strengthening a sense of classroom community.

### *Design*

Based on input from the analysis stage, we have begun to compile a list of design decisions and guiding principles. We are thus hoping to create a blueprint for developing instructional materials that streamlines the process and yet offers flexibility in terms of handling a wide range of content, language difficulty, and teacher variability. Our working list of design decisions include:

1. Clear performance objectives will be established at both the macro (curriculum) and micro (task or activity) levels (see, for example, Mager, 1997).
2. The curriculum will include work on all four language-skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) but will concentrate more effort on improving the receptive skills of reading and listening at earlier stages and productive skills later in the program.
3. Criterion-referenced test items will be developed to clearly measure progress and performance (see, for example, Shrock & Coscarelli, 1989).
4. All components will have the underlying goal of increasing familiarity with the most frequent words in the English language. (Nation, 2002)
5. Attention will be focused on improving both language competencies (including communication strategies) and social skills.
6. The core element of the course will be three-week modules based on specific industries (e.g. travel, fashion) or issues (e.g. outsourcing, business ethics).

7. Attention will also be directed at raising cross-cultural awareness and nurturing positive language learning attitudes and beliefs.
8. Individualized instruction will be implemented whenever possible.

In designing the curriculum we made use of the following list of guiding principals.

- Effective and efficient use of existing resources,
- Balance between face-to-face meetings and self-access materials,
- Balance between concept learning and procedural learning,
- Activities and materials that appeal to various learning styles,
- Activities and materials that are intrinsically motivating,
- Teaching methodology based on accepted and emerging theories of learning,
- Activities and materials that promote success and boost confidence,
- Get students active within the first five minutes of any encounter,
- Include non-native varieties of English

Both of these lists are works in progress and we are evaluating these as we proceed with other phases of the ID project.

### *Development*

Development is proceeding along several lines. First, we are working on the outlines for each level and the criterion-referenced test items. We are compiling a list of vocabulary test questions targeting the most frequent 1,000, 1,500 and 2,000 words as well as words from the academic words list (Coxhead, 2000). We have also been developing and test piloting some of the modules discussed above.

At the micro level we are developing activities to include in each module and which target specific language skills. Examples include (1) a PowerPoint activity (Appendix 1) aimed at introducing and practicing important reading sub-skills and boosting reading rates, and (2) a listening activity (Appendix 2) that focuses attention on common communication strategies and non-native varieties of English. The emphasis on receptive skills is aligned with overall course goals as described above in the Design Decisions.

### *Implementation*

We have been test piloting the above-mentioned course modules dealing with specific industries and issues, as well as activities and materials like the Reading Skills PowerPoint Activity (Appendix 1) and the Communication Strategies Podcast Activity (Appendix 2). Follow up questionnaires so far have revealed a need to simplify material and allow for more time for individual components (Appendix 3). We will continue to modify and adjust as we prepare for full implementation in Spring 2007.

### Evaluation

In addition to various forms of evaluation in each of the above-mentioned stages, we have attempted other formative evaluation of activities via follow up questionnaires and interviews. Feedback has been mostly favorable (Appendix 3) but we will continue to modify these activities in preparation for full implementation. At the same time, we will gather exit-level and follow up data for our summative evaluation. Findings from each term will provide input for further refinements as we cycle through the process again and again. In this way, we feel that the Business English program will continue to be improved each year and efforts can be better focused toward helping each learner reach their potential. A more in-depth discussion of evaluating human resource development programs can be found in Phillips (1997), including how to measure return on investment (ROI).

Using experiences gained during the above design process and investigations in related areas, we would like to conclude with some implications and anticipated changes in our roles as language teachers in these types of contexts.

### Conclusion

Technological developments will continue to influence the language learning classroom and present teachers with a broader range of options for delivering instruction. It is hoped that this discussion helps readers understand the value of a systematic approach to curriculum and activities design and to acknowledge that any decisions on what media and technologies to let into our language classrooms can and should be based on a sound understanding of ID principles.

Granted, an ID approach to course development requires quite a bit of time and effort. Still, the potential benefits make this worthwhile and the return on investment (ROI) should increase as each project matures (i.e. greater returns will come from less investment of time and energy).

An increasing emphasis on ROI for such programs is one of the changes that can be anticipated in our field. Schools and companies cannot continue to devote money and resources to programs that cannot demonstrate their viability and effectiveness. Greater accountability is being demanded of classroom teachers, materials developers, curriculum specialists, and other related professionals. One way we can meet these demands and the changing environment is to expand the view of our role as language teachers. In addition to becoming more involved in instructional design, we can assume new relationships with our learners such as that of client and consultant. Block (2002) provides a useful framework and guiding principles in the area of consulting and his writings offer a new perspective on the teacher-student relationship. We can and should be demand of students a 50-50 level of commitment and responsibility for success in class. Another endeavor that will help boost ROI is teaching our learners how to make better use of the services we provide. The concept of do-it-yourself customers (see, for example, Honebein & Cammarano, 2005) is spreading through society and there are definite applications for the field of language instruction. Focusing more attention on customer (student) satisfaction should put us in a better position to deal with the changing environment in our field and raise the level of individual and collective professionalism.

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## Appendix 1

### Reading Skills PowerPoint Activity – Lesson Plan Introduction

This activity is designed to introduce or reinforce the concept of “chunking” and stress to learners the importance of faster reading rates. The activity includes a mini lecture, a PowerPoint presentation with a short story broken into chunks, a summarizing task, a printed copy of the story and follow up language exercises. The PowerPoint file is available for download from <[www.eigohyogen.com/ramen\\_shop.ppt](http://www.eigohyogen.com/ramen_shop.ppt)>.

### Rationale

One of the main goals of the Business English program is to expose participants to as much target language as possible and build confidence with high frequency words of the



English language. To gain increased input, students need to read faster. This activity will show students that they can read faster with increased comprehension.

### Materials

- Blackboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers
- Computer, connecting cables, projector and screen
- PowerPoint software and PowerPoint file (<[www.eigohyogen.com/ramen\\_shop.ppt](http://www.eigohyogen.com/ramen_shop.ppt)>)
- Handout of the story (not included)

### Procedure

1. Write up for public display the word “chunking.”
2. Ask how this word is related to reading. Encourage guessing.
3. Write up “The young man sat on the bench, took out his lunch and began to eat” and ask how many words are in this sentence. Elicit the number 15.
4. Ask if we read and think about every word in the sentence when encountering this sentence in a piece of text.
5. Explain that NO, we probably don’t read and think about every word but instead break the sentence into meaningful “chunks” according to meaning.
6. Divide the sentence into “chunks” with slashes as follows: “The young man / sat on the bench, / took out his lunch / and began to eat.”
7. Explain that instead of 15 words, with “chunking” we only need to process 4 ideas.
8. Tell students they will be reading a story about a noodle shop owner via chunks presented with a PowerPoint presentation. Ask the students to concentrate carefully, don’t worry about unknown words and read for overall meaning.
9. With the automatic screen change set for 2 seconds, start the PowerPoint.
10. Following the presentation (approx. 4.5 minutes), ask students to write a short summary (3 or 4 sentences) of what they read.
11. Ask students to read their summary in pairs or small groups.
12. Write up “WPM” and the numbers “180 – 200” on the board.
13. Explain that 180 to 200 words per minute is commonly accepted as the threshold at which we can begin concentrating on overall meaning instead of being occupied by each of the words.
14. Ask students to guess how fast they were just reading. Elicit guesses.
15. Explain that with the timing set for 2 seconds a screen, they were reading at about 80 WPM but will now try to boost that up.
16. With the automatic screen change set for 1 second, start the PowerPoint again.

17. Congratulate students on reading 160 WPM and moving much closer to the 180 – 200 WPM threshold.
18. Follow up by passing out copies of the story and comprehension questions.
19. Extend the activity by discussing what qualities are important for succeeding in business, etc.

### *Caveat*

This activity oversimplifies the complexities of reading. Also, our brains are highly effective in finding the most efficient way to go about the business of processing written text. Students should be reminded of this and the fact that this activity is only offered as one form of reading practice.

## Appendix 2

### Communication Strategies Podcast Activity – Lesson Plan

#### *Introduction*

The needs analysis highlighted the importance of having a workable set of communication strategies. Thus, this activity is being designed to raise awareness of two major communication strategies: adding extra information and asking follow-up questions. At the same time, we recognize a need for exposure to non-native varieties of English. The lesson plan involves listening to a podcast segment in which an instructor in the Business English program interviews a visiting graduate student from Malaysia about her studies and life here in Japan. Participants are asked to listen for

specific communication strategies as well as details about the visiting student. We prepared a rough script for the interview (not included), but did not want to over prepare and make the interview sound unnatural. The interview was recorded digitally and the sound file has been uploaded to a podcast page at <[web.mac.com/bjones\\_jp/iWeb/kgu\\_be/podcast/podcast.html](http://web.mac.com/bjones_jp/iWeb/kgu_be/podcast/podcast.html)>. A printed copy of the full transcript (available at <[www.eigohyogen.com/mandy\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.eigohyogen.com/mandy_transcript.pdf)>) is also used in the activity.

#### *Rationale*

This activity provides students with real-life listening practice and students in our business English program will likely identify with the interviewee, thus boosting motivation. At the same time, the focus on communication strategies will hopefully highlight the importance of these two useful strategies.

#### *Materials*

- Blackboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers
- Audio file (mandy\_interview at <[web.mac.com/bjones\\_jp/iWeb/kgu\\_be/podcast/podcast.html](http://web.mac.com/bjones_jp/iWeb/kgu_be/podcast/podcast.html)>)
- Audio equipment to play the file (can be burned to CD if necessary)
- Printed copies of the transcript (<[www.waei.com/mandy\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.waei.com/mandy_transcript.pdf)>)

*Procedure*

1. Write up or dictate the following questions:
  - a. What is the interviewee's name?
  - b. Where is her hometown and where was she born?
  - c. How many times has she been to Japan?
  - d. What is she researching in Japan?
  - e. What is her impression of Japan?
  - f. When will she return to her home country?
2. Students listen to the podcast and write down any answers they can find.
3. Check answers with partner and then as a class.
4. Read through the transcript and have students:
  - a. circle any follow-up questions, and
  - b. underline any examples of extra information (details, examples, related information, etc.)
5. Listen again and displaying the transcript with answers to #3 highlighted.
6. Ask students to write at least three other questions they would like to ask the interviewee.
7. Share these questions with a partner and then the class.
8. If possible, invite the interviewee to class (maybe at some future time) and let students lead a follow up interview.

## Appendix 3

**Activity Evaluations***Reading Skills PowerPoint Activity*

This activity was test piloted with four groups of students (n = 23, 21, 40 & 27) enrolled in elective Business English classes in our department. An activity evaluation questionnaire was administered to two of these groups and a summary of findings is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Follow-up questionnaire results (Reading Skills PowerPoint Activity). (n = 52)**

1. Useful for improving English reading skills.	Very useful = 4 (8%), Useful = 35 (67%), Somewhat useful = 11 (21%), Somewhat useless = 2 (4%), Useless = 0 (0%)
2. Interesting	Very interesting = 4 (8%), Interesting = 20 (38%), Somewhat interesting = 23 (44%), Somewhat uninteresting = 4 (8%), Uninteresting = 1 (2%)
3. Level of difficulty	Very difficult = 10 (19%), Difficult = 29 (56%), Somewhat difficult = 10 (19%), Somewhat easy = 3 (6%), Easy = 0 (0%)
4. I would like to do this kind of activity again in the future.	Strongly agree = 2 (4%), Agree = 16 (31%), Somewhat agree = 23 (44%), Somewhat Disagree = 9 (17%), Disagree = 2 (4%), Strongly disagree = 0 (0%)

The questionnaire also included a free response section where students could offer feedback on the activities in Japanese. Rough translations of these free responses are included below.

In general, students recognized the usefulness of the activity and rated it as being interesting (38%) or somewhat

interesting (44%). This activity was overwhelmingly rated as difficult, with 19% of respondents rating it very difficult. However, most respondents were at least mildly interested in doing similar activities in the future. Our interpretation of the results is that students struggled with this activity but would gain confidence with repeated exposure.

#### *Free Responses (translated from Japanese)*

- The screens changed too quickly and I couldn't catch much of the content of the story.
- I would prefer starting at a slower level (because I have trouble with English).
- The pace was too fast and the story finished before I could catch very much.
- The flow of the sentences was constructed quite well.
- It would have helped to have more time for this activity.
- This was an interesting PowerPoint.
- I think using PowerPoint is a very good idea, but starting out at a fast pace makes it difficult to follow the story. It would be better to start out at a slower speed.
- I would like to have more time for discussion.
- This story helped me understand the importance of realizing our dreams.
- I felt as if we were viewing the sentences/story instead of reading, so it was enjoyable.
- I would like to hear about other stories besides the noodle shop.
- The story was a little long. I think it would be better to have a little shorter story.
- Reading fast like this is difficult.
- The time was too short so I couldn't read. If we can catch the flow of the story it is not necessary to read the story in its entirety. I would prefer to read like that.
- I thought it was a little fast so I would like to understand more.
- It was a difficult story but interesting because it is a well-known name.
- The speed was too fast.
- Very useful for reading English more rapidly.
- It is very useful, but now I want to improve my listening skill. So I prefer the next activity.
- It is enjoyable to spend more time thinking about the meaning, so slower is better.
- Speed is very fast, but this is very useful to pick up important point.
- The pace was fast.
- Too fast.
- Japanese style so deeply interesting.
- I was too busy trying to translate.

### Communication Strategies Podcast Activity

We test piloted this lesson plan with the same groups of students mentioned above and then administered the activity evaluation questionnaire. Results are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2. Follow-up questionnaire results (Communication Strategies Podcast Activity). (n = 53)**

1. Useful for improving English reading skills.	Very useful = 12 (23%), Useful = 32 (60%), Somewhat useful = 7 (13%), Somewhat useless = 2 (4%), Useless = 0 (0%)
2. Interesting	Very interesting = 5 (9%), Interesting = 25 (47%), Somewhat interesting = 20 (38%), Somewhat uninteresting = 2 (4%), Uninteresting = 1 (2%)
3. Level of difficulty	Very difficult = 17 (32%), Difficult = 22 (41%), Somewhat difficult = 11 (21%), Somewhat easy = 3 (6%), Easy = 0 (0%)
4. I would like to do this kind of activity again in the future.	Strongly agree = 5 (9%), Agree = 27 (51%), Somewhat agree = 8 (15%), Somewhat Disagree = 11 (21%), Disagree = 2 (4%), Strongly disagree = 0 (0%)

Again, respondents overwhelmingly rated this activity as useful and at least somewhat interesting. However, more respondents rated this activity as very difficult (32%) and expressed apprehension about doing this type of activity in the future. We believe most of the difficulty was due to the strong accent of the interviewee and extended length of her responses. It might help to more closely script this type of interview. Still, the free responses highlight to us the high level of interest in this kind of listening practice.

### Free Responses (translated from Japanese)

- It is difficult for me to listen but reading is easy.
- It was good to listen first and then listen again with the printed version. I could confirm the parts I couldn't hear.
- I don't get many opportunities to listen to non-Japanese speakers so it was interesting. I thought this was useful.
- I wanted more time to think.
- There wasn't enough time, so I would like to have more time.
- A little difficult.
- I could clearly understand Brent's voice but couldn't catch what the interviewee said.
- This is good study for listening to English.
- Interesting
- I am not used to this kind of activity so I couldn't catch what was being said.
- The speaker seems to have a deep interest in Japan.
- Listening is important so I would like to have more activities like this.
- Without out having more time, I can't finish. I can't follow.
- We should listen again, again, and again.
- I think this is a very useful activity for improving our listening skills.

- I thought difficult speaking of Malaysia. So I couldn't listening more.
- A little difficult to listen.
- The conversation was easy to follow.
- Very useful for listening to English and guessing.
- This is very good activity. I hope that you do like this every lesson.
- Fast and difficult.
- It is very useful to listen to naïve speakers of English.
- Difficult to hear what is being said.
- Speaking is fast but I enjoyed listening to English being spoken smoothly.