

Can They Understand What I Say? Part 2 – Slow down

Americans often talk very fast, and teachers are no exception. We are often in a time-crunch to meet learning goals within the school year. To compensate, we may fly through spoken words, squeezing them into seemingly foreign sentences (Tay-kow-chur work = Take out your homework assignment) or questions (Zev-ree-buddy-dun? = Has everyone finished their work?). Content vocabulary may be only a blur.

English language learners often can't listen very fast. They may have difficulty discerning where one word ends and the next one begins. It takes time for them to understand how the spoken patterns of rhythm and voice inflection provide meaningful communication signals. In the meantime, they may be lost.

When talking with students struggling with new vocabulary, including beginning and intermediate English language learners, remember that they may need extra time to comprehend what they hear. Fortunately you can apply strategies to help. You shift gears and slow down your speaking rate a bit; as each student's listening proficiency increases, so can your the pace. You enunciate a little more than usual. You leave short gaps (a couple of seconds) at the end of key vocabulary words and definitions to both emphasize their importance and to allow students time to catch up in their understanding. By slowing down, you may actually increase how quickly they can make meaningful connections.

English language learners are listening as fast as they can. They appreciate your help.