

Unit 4 Theatre

Literature: A play

Listening skills: Listening for connected speech

Speaking skills: Using tentative language

1 SPEAKING

- a** Work in pairs. What do you know about cloning? Are the following statements true or false?
- 1 Since Dolly the sheep was cloned in 1996, many other animals have been cloned, for example, cats, deer, dogs, horses, rabbits and rats.
 - 2 Cloned animals always look the same.
 - 3 Human stem cells have been cloned in laboratories to grow human tissue.
 - 4 A human being has never been cloned.
- b** In the future, do you think scientists will try and clone a human being? Why / why not?

2 LISTENING

- a** **4.1** You will hear Leo give a presentation about a play called *A Number* by Caryl Churchill.

Key points

A Number
by Caryl Churchill

Characters: Salter (father) and his sons (Bernard 1, Bernard 2)

Setting: Near future

Dramatic conflict: Salter's sons discover they are clones



Leo's presentation is for an English literature course. What do you think he will talk about in his presentation?

- 1 characters in the play
 - 2 the story of the play
 - 3 actors who have appeared in productions
 - 4 the themes of the play
 - 5 costumes used in the play
 - 6 the type of play
- b** **4.1** Listen for the features of the play Leo talks about. Were your ideas in 2a correct? Why didn't he talk about all the features?
- c** **4.1** Listen again and make notes on the four features of the play from 2a that Leo talks about.

STUDY SKILLS: PREDICTING CONTENT

- 1 Given that Leo was going to talk about a play for an English literature course, was it likely that he would mention all the categories in 2a?
- 2 Is it sometimes possible to predict the kind of things that will be talked about in a lecture or presentation? Why? How?
- 3 How does predicting content help you listen?

d CRITICAL THINKING INFERRING THEMES

Think about the questions and make notes. Discuss your ideas together.

- 1 What does the play suggest is important about personal identity?
- 2 What do you think are other moral problems associated with cloning? Consider the following areas: psychology, society, biology, ethics

3 PRONUNCIATION Connected speech

- a** **4.2** Listen to the first two sentences of Leo's presentation and notice the way his pronunciation sometimes joins together.

Key

/ə/ = the vowel sound is weak

— = he links the sound from one word to the next

/j/ or /w/ or /r/ = he adds one of these sounds between words to join them together

h or t = he leaves this sound out

OK, ah, the play ^{/j/} I'd like to talk ^{/ə/} about ^{/ə/} is ^{/ə/} called ^{/ə/} *A Number*
and ^{/ə/} it's written by the British playwright Caryl Churchill.
^{/ə/} Do you remember? We, we looked ^{/ə/} at ^{/ə/} her play *Top Girls* last term.

- b** **4.3** Listen to the next two sentences. Mark the features of connected speech from 3a that you can hear.

Um, OK, *A Number* was written after *Top Girls* ... in 2002.

So it's more than 15 years old, and and you you might

think that that's a bit dated, but, actually, um, really, I I

think a lot of the themes of the play are still like

really relevant today.

c Choose the best answer to each question.

- 1 Why does Leo join his speech in this way?
 - a He has a very relaxed way of talking.
 - b It's typical natural speech.
- 2 How can you improve your ability to understand connected speech?
 - a Practise listening intensively to short pieces of authentic speech and listening for the way things join.
 - b Practise listening to longer stretches of authentic speech and try and get the main idea of what the speaker is saying.

4 LANGUAGE FOCUS Tentative language

a Notice the **bold** expression in the excerpt from the presentation below.

*And given what happens in the play – it's still the future. But **let's say** that it's a near future.*

It makes Leo's statement about a 'near future' tentative, in other words, a little less certain. Underline the examples of tentative language in sentences 1–13.

- 1 He reacts to this news relatively positively and suggests that he might meet them.
- 2 ... it's got what I'd call a tragic ending.
- 3 ... on one level, you could say this is a really simple play.
- 4 I'd say it's probably like an hour long.
- 5 However, by the same token, you could argue that it's quite a complicated play.
- 6 My impression is that *A Number* is quite complex in terms of the different themes that it introduces ...
- 7 ... because they're clones, they're obviously identical in terms of their genetic make-up, but you wouldn't say they're the same.
- 8 B2 is fairly relaxed, but B1 is very much not.
- 9 ... it's likely that Salter probably wasn't a good father when the Bernards were growing up.
- 10 ... there's a theme in the play, to some degree, about ... what it is to be a good parent.
- 11 ... and finally, *A Number* is to some extent a discussion ... on the moral implications of cloning.
- 12 Also the dialogue is often indirect ... so it's sometimes difficult to say what the character is really sort of expressing.
- 13 ... generally, I like plays like this because they make me think harder ... and it's not too obvious.

b Which of the expressions could be used in an essay as well as in spoken language?

c Read the description of another Caryl Churchill play. Add the tentative language to the line of the text in brackets.

relatively (1) fairly (2) to some degree (5)
 I'd say (6) you could argue that (8)
 what I'd call (10) sometimes (11)
 you could say (13) to some extent (14)
 my impression is that (15)

Another important and well-known play by Caryl Churchill is *Top Girls*. In the first scene a successful corporate woman, Marlene, is having dinner with five guests who are all historical figures. Marlene is celebrating her promotion over a male colleague and all of her guests are women who have won some kind of battle against men in history. So the first scene is a kind of fantasy and it's not naturalistic. However, the rest of the play is more naturalistic and it looks at the outcome of Marlene's promotion and then, in the final act, there is a flashback to Marlene's past and her relationship with her sister and niece. At first, it's difficult to understand the connection between the first scene and the rest of the play. A key question in this play is: what is the cost to women who pursue a career at the expense of family and emotional ties? The play was written during the eighties, but many of its themes still seem relevant today.

d  Work in pairs. Cover the tentative language on the right. Take turns reading the description of *Top Girls* to each other. As you read, try to add tentative language. It doesn't have to be exactly the same as the example in 4c.

5 SPEAKING

- a** Think of a play, film, TV series, book or video game that you are familiar with. Make notes about the story, characters, key features and themes.
- b**  Tell your partner about what you have made notes on. Use tentative language in your explanation. As you listen to each other, note down the tentative expressions your partner uses.
- c**  Choose one or two pieces of information that your partner introduced with tentative language. Ask them why they did this.

6 READING

a Read the excerpt from the end of the first scene of *A Number* and answer the questions.

- 1 What does B2 learn in this scene?
- 2 In his seminar, Leo talked about the fact that Salter lies to his sons. What lie does he tell B2 in this scene?
- 3 Which of the themes that Leo talked about in his presentation are illustrated in this scene?
- 4 What's interesting about the way the dialogue is written?

b The dialogue in the excerpt aims to represent spoken language. Match examples 1 to 4 from the play to the features of spoken language a to d.

- 1 **B2** So what about this original? I don't quite I don't
 - 2 **B2** Some time before I was born there was
SALTER another son, yes, a first
 - 3 **B2** but another child might have been better
SALTER no I wanted the same
B2 but I'm not him
SALTER no but you're just the way I wanted
 - 4 **B2** A son of yours?
...
B2 who what, who died
- a A speaker completes the idea of the other speaker.
 - b Statements are questions and questions are statements.
 - c A speaker doesn't complete what he's going to say.
 - d Speakers seem to overlap one another and their exchanges are almost like one sentence.

c Look at the complete scene in a and answer the questions.

- 1 What aspect of punctuation shows how speakers overlap each other and complete each other's thoughts?
- 2 How can actors show whether they are asking a real question or not?

Excerpt from *A Number*

- B2** So what about this original? I don't quite I don't
SALTER There was someone.
B2 There was what kind of someone?
SALTER There was a son.
B2 A son of yours?
SALTER Yes.
B2 So when was that?
SALTER That was some time earlier.
B2 Some time before I was born there was
SALTER another son, yes, a first
B2 who what, who died
SALTER who died, yes
B2 and you wanted to replace him
SALTER I wanted
B2 instead of just having another child you wanted
SALTER because your mother was dead too
B2 but she died when I was born, I thought she
SALTER well I'm telling you what happened.
B2 So what happened?
SALTER So they'd been killed in a carcrash and
B2 my mother and this
SALTER carcrash
B2 when was this? how old was the child, was he
SALTER four, he was four
B2 and you wanted him back
SALTER yes
B2 so I'm just him over again.
SALTER No but you are you because that's who you are
but I wanted one just the same because that
seemed to me the most perfect
B2 but another child might have been better
SALTER no I wanted the same
B2 but I'm not him
SALTER no but you're just the way I wanted
B2 but I could have been a different person not
like him I
SALTER how could you? if I'd had a different child that
wouldn't be you, you it. You're this one.
B2 I'm just a copy. I'm not the real one.
SALTER You're the only one.
B2 What do you mean only, there's all the others,
there's
SALTER but I didn't know that, that wasn't part of the
deal. They were meant to make one of you not
a whole number, they stole that, we'll deal
with, it's something for the lawyers. But you're
what I wanted, you're the one.
B2 Did you give me the same name as him?
SALTER Does it make it worse?
B2 Probably.

End of scene.