ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN VET
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1. Oral communication as an underpinning skill
• equivalent to literacy and numeracy; important for all
• and yet little explicit focus; reasons for this?

2. Disadvantages faced by ESL speakers – equity issue

Evidence from statistics
• VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999:27): three and half years after immigration, the unemployment rate among those speaking (as opposed to reading/writing) English 'well' was 8%, whereas that of those who spoke English 'poorly' was 41%.
• Rates of improvement in English speaking ability (self-assessed) in the LSIA as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English level</th>
<th>6 months after arrival</th>
<th>1.5 years after arrival</th>
<th>3.5 years after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best/only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
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<td>Best/only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not well</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best/only</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not well</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Evidence from studies and surveys
• “Levels of English language proficiency vary greatly [within the NESB group], but where they are low they pose the greatest barrier to training and employment for NESB people. As Misko (1997, p.61) argued, 'being of non-English speaking background seems of little relevance to being employed as an apprentice or trainee. What was important was the ability to speak English'. (Volkoff and Golding 1998: 45)

Evidence from anecdote and personal experience

3. Causes of this situation
• Complex: Teachers/methods/materials; policy; research (cf Fraser ‘Coordinating’)
4. Other Issues

- Problems of definition of ‘NESB’; problems of assessment of ESL speakers; problems of relationship between literacy and oral language; problems of mixed classes of NS and NNS (Volkoff, Watson, Sanguinetti, O’Neill, and others)
- Disillusionment? (Understandable)
- Misinformation? Lack of awareness of problem (Falk and Millar)?
- Lack of will???????

5. Solutions?

- NB – IT IS NOT INEVITABLE! ‘FOREIGN ACCENT’ MAY BE CLOSE TO INEVITABLE BUT COMPREHENSIBLE PRONUNCIATION IS ATTAINABLE, AND IN REASONABLE TIME
- Generally- coordination of academic research, policy research, policy implementation, methods and materials development, teacher education, workplace training
- Specifically – teacher/trainer education; direct training for ESL speakers; AND training for NS managers, colleagues (but NB this in itself is not enough)
- CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE of sound communicative methods
- NB Big success of recent teacher/trainer sessions

5. Questions for discussion today

- Is enough being done?
- Are the right things being done?
- Is there a lack of will? If so, why? Could it be for historical reasons, and is it now possible to move beyond these?
- What about oral communication more generally? Surely it is as important as literacy, numeracy? Surely we can help people with it effectively?

6. Some references (more refs and some downloads on website)
Fraser, H. in prep. Integrating Pronunciation Tuition into Teaching and Training – Notes from an eight-week course with teachers and trainers
Fraser, H. 2000. ‘Tips for teaching pronunciation: Recording students’ voices.’ ATEsol Journal (Canberra, ACT).
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Fraser, H. 1999. ‘ESL pronunciation teaching: Could it be more effective?’ Australian Language Matters. 7(4) p.7-8.