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Adaptation of Phonetics Course Material to Accommodate a Blind Student

Mary Gospel
Butler University, mgospel@butler.edu

Kathleen Camire
Butler University, kcamire@butler.edu

Haley Summer

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Adaptation of Phonetics Course Material to Accommodate a Blind Student

Mary Gospel, Ph.D., CCC, Kathleen Camire, MS and Haley Sumner
Butler University, Indianapolis, IN

INTRODUCTION:

A blind student enrolled in the Introduction to Phonetics course in the CSD department at a midwestern university. A team consisting of the student, the professor, and members of the Student Disability Services (SDS) office successfully adapted course material and teaching style in order to best accommodate the student. The student used an electronic reader called JAWS (Job Access with Speech, Freedom Scientific) in order to access her texts.

INITIAL CONCERNS:

➤ How would symbols transfer from pdf version of text to Word, which was necessary for effective use of screen reading software?
➤ How would electronic reader interpret IPA symbols?
➤ What would be most effective way to use symbols on exams and homework?
➤ How would classroom style be modified since document camera had been used exclusively in past?
➤ Did she need to know what the symbols looked like?

TEXTBOOK ACCESSIBILITY:

➤ Text used was *Clinical Phonetics: 4th ed. (2013) by Shriberg and Kent*
➤ SDS staff requested text in PDF from Access Text Network
➤ Used ABBYY Fine Reader to convert PDF into Word but most IPA symbols did not transfer
➤ SDS staff and student entered codes for IPA symbols and pronunciation into JAWS dictionary based on information published by Penn State University on unicodes for IPA
➤ Selected diagrams and tables were described by SDS staff within body of word document
➤ Phonetic symbols were manually entered into text using codes by CSD student hired by SDS because JAWS needed unicodes in order to read the text

CLASSROOM ADAPTATIONS:

➤ The student was provided with all lecture notes in a Word document prior to class.
➤ All material presented on the document camera during class needed to be presented orally as well
➤ Lists of the practice words and handouts needed to be prepared in advance so they could be e-mailed to the student before class
➤ Quizzes were e-mailed to the student directly before class began. She took the quizzes in class and e-mailed the completed quiz to the instructor
➤ Exams had to be re-worked and were taken in the Testing Center using an SDS computer with an updated JAWS dictionary

STUDENT COMMENTS:

"Before I started the course, I had a few questions concerning how I would read and write the IPA symbols, but once I discovered the Jaws dictionary file containing the IPA symbols, my concerns immediately faded. Other than modifying my Jaws pronunciation dictionary and installing a few additional files to the screen reading software, the class hasn't been different in means of adaptation or difficulty. Taking this class allowed me to solidify my decision in declaring my major in Communication Sciences and Disorders, and is by far my favorite class thus far in my college career."

SURPRISING OUTCOMES:

➤ Presenting symbols verbally and visually improved students' use of correct symbol names when they were asked to dictate transcription. In previous semesters, students still saying things like "upside down e" for schwa several weeks into semester. This strategy will continue in further semesters.
➤ Second positive outcome was that the professor was forced to be well-organized in order to have materials ready early enough to be submitted to the student. Better organization was beneficial to all of the students and the professor as well.