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TESL Reporter

A Forum for and by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

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Using Game Playability as a Framework for Professional Development in Language Teaching

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Abstract

It may be difficult for some language teachers to identify how they can improve and what changes they ought to make to their language teaching. This paper proposes that teachers may benefit from learning about the concept of game playability in Human-Computer Interaction and game development and then applying the concept of playability to the language teaching and learning that occurs in their classroom. We begin by summarizing the factors and attributes of playability identified by Sánchez, Gutiérrez Vela, Simmaro, and Padilla-Zea (2012) and then compare these to factors and attributes of language teaching and learning. Lastly, in an attempt to help teachers apply the concept of playability to their language teaching, this paper proposes four self-reflection activities, a method of conducting teaching peer-review, and a form for students to evaluate teachers' activities and tasks, using playability as a framework.

Keywords: self-reflection, language teaching, language learning, playability, learnability, professional development, peer review, student evaluation, game development

Introduction

As an external observer we might think of solutions to problems that we normally do not see when we are locked into playing a game or teaching a class (Donnelly, 2007). The purpose of this article is to encourage language teachers to engage in reflective exercises in which they view their own language classroom from the perspective of an external observer with the hopes that solutions to hindrances to learning in the language classroom can be found. Specifically, teachers are encouraged to view the language teaching and learning that occurs in their classroom from the perspective of a game developer, with the concept of game

playability in mind. Thinking of language teaching and learning in terms of playability may help teachers to view their teaching holistically, with the concept of playability acting as the hub or center of a wheel, connecting many important yet seemingly unrelated concepts of language teaching like pace, usability, learner autonomy, learner interaction, and the quality teaching and learning materials. By viewing these terms as interconnected spokes on a wheel, connecting to and interacting with the concept of playability, teachers may more easily identify hindrances to learning in their language classrooms as well as think of ways to remove those hindrances.

Playability and Game Design

Before asking teachers to reflect on the language teaching and learning that occurs in their classrooms, we suggest that teachers first consider the concept of playability in game development. According to Sánchez, Zea, and Gutiérrez (2009), the concept of game playability is of paramount importance for game developers to be able to provide potential buyers an entertaining game with optimum Player eXperience (PX). Usability First, a website created with the purpose of informing readers about designing software and websites, defines playability as “the degree to which a game is fun to play and usable, with an emphasis on the interaction style...the quality of gameplay” (Usability First, n.d.). Sánchez et al. (2012) describe playability as “the degree to which specified users can achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and, especially, satisfaction and fun in a playable context of use” (p. 1037). These authors also point out that playability is affected by a variety of factors including pace, usability, customizability, intensity of interaction, the degree of realism, and quality of graphics and sound.

As a way to measure the quality of gameplay, it is easy to see how playability is essential to developing a game that consumers want to buy and play. If the pace of a game is too slow, then users may get bored with it and stop playing the game. The slow pace causes the game to have low playability. Likewise, if the controls, level design, or other features of a game are confusing, then players may get frustrated and stop playing. Low playability results in a poor PX which means that it is less likely that consumers will buy the game or continue to play the game if it has already been purchased. Customizability, one of the factors that affects playability, demonstrates the need for careful consideration and bal-

ance when making decisions that affect playability. While on the one hand having a game that is customizable may lead to a better PX, a game that has too much customizability may be overwhelming for users and have the adverse effect of lowering overall playability. This demonstrates the difficulty game developers face when trying to create a meaningful and satisfying experience for each player. Each player, having different preferences, might not get satisfaction from the same part of a videogame (Sánchez et al., 2012). In short, playability is an essential component of game design and must be taken in consideration throughout the entire process of game development.

Playability and Language Learning

The interrelation between playing and learning is by no means a new idea. In ancient Greek and Latin cultures, which to this day still strongly influence many aspects of Western civilization (like education), games, playing, and learning were all closely related (Botturi & Loh, 2008). The Greek word *paideia* denoted both game and education. The root of *paideia*, **pai*, can be found in the Greek word for playing, *paizó* (Botturi & Loh, 2008, p. 17), and the Greek word for boy or child, *pais* (Harper, n.d.). The word for school in Greek, *skhole* meant “spare time, leisure... that in which leisure is employed; learned discussion” (Harper, n.d.). The idea that playing and learning go hand and hand is still present in Western civilization today. Dutch historian Johan Huizinga has been quoted as saying “Let my playing be my learning, and my learning be my playing.” (Botturi & Loh, 2008, p. 1). Likewise, Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian scholar of communications and media studies, has been quoted as saying “anyone who makes a distinction between games and learning doesn't know the first thing about either” (Becker, 2010, p. 22). With this understanding of the interconnectedness of playing and learning, consider the importance of playability in language teaching and learning.

Although game developers and language teachers may ultimately have completely different goals, language teachers and educators may benefit from thinking about their curriculum, lessons, tasks, and activities in terms of playability. Just as playability is essential to any game developer who wants to attract and retain a player base, playability is vital to any language teacher who wants students to tune in and participate throughout an entire class session or course.

Pace

Pace, one of the key factors of playability mentioned above, relates to language teaching and learning. If the pace of an activity, lesson, or course is too slow, then students are likely to get bored and lose motivation to participate. Conversely, if the pace is too fast then students may feel overwhelmed and become discouraged. The timing of activities and stages of a lesson is of critical importance (Harmer, 1998, p. 124). An inappropriate pace results in a poor Learner eXperience (LX) and this contributes to the activity, lesson, or course having low learnability. Modifying the definition of playability given by Sánchez et al. (2012) learnability could be defined as “the degree to which *language learners* can achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and, especially, satisfaction and fun in a playable context of use.” By carefully considering the factors that influence playability (pace, usability, customizability, intensity of interaction, and the quality of graphics and sound [materials]), language teachers might come up with ways to improve the LX of their students.

Usability

Usability is also a shared concept between playability and language teaching. In game design, usability is a defining concept of the user experience (Sánchez et al., 2012), traditionally being seen as a measure of how effective and intuitive something is in allowing the user to reach their goal (Isbister & Schaffer, 2015, p.3). The goal of games is for the user to have fun, simply put if the usability of a game is low, the player will not want to play. In language teaching, where the goal is to improve a student's language level, usability can refer to two things, the first being whether or not students understand how to use what is being taught, and the second being whether or not the lesson's learning aims can actually be used by the students in real life.

The concept of usability relates to two common theories of learning: Krashen's input hypothesis and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Krashen's Input Hypothesis is a well-known theory within language teaching which posits that learners need to have access to language slightly beyond their current level, often described as $i+1$ (Krashen, 1985). This is similar to Vygotsky's theoretical construct of the Zone of Proximal Development, which posits that there is a space between what learners can't do and what they can do unaided. This space is the zone

of Proximal Development and it includes what the learner can do with guidance (Chaiklin, 2003). If the teacher's instructions, the materials, the tasks set, learning objectives, or any number of possible elements of the classroom are not at the right level then the lesson may be 'unusable' because they are not effective or intuitive in aiding the learner improve their language level. If the level of the lesson is not suitable for the learner, then they will feel discouraged, unmotivated, and they may even want to disengage with the lesson (Ghazali et al., 2009), all of which impede learning. Similarly, when the usability of a game is low, a phenomenon known as 'rage quitting' may occur, this is when players feel so frustrated they end the game prematurely and do not want to continue playing (Hodent, 2017).

Usability of video games also relates to their control system, if the operation desired requires a too complex set of inputs, the menus are vague or unintuitive, or the hardware has poor ergonomics, then the player will find it frustrating and not want to continue playing (Sanchez et al., 2012). In the language classroom the control system is best viewed when considering the tasks teachers ask of students. For example, a multiple choice answer based on a reading text's "control system" may be the way in which a learner inputs their answers, if the boxes are confusing, disorganized or unclear then the student will have a difficult time answering the questions. Equally, the menu system could be viewed as how the students navigate to the answers in the text, for example 'the answers can all be found in paragraph 5' but one of the answers is in paragraph 6, then the student would understandably feel annoyed.

Finally, usability can relate to language teaching when we think about the needs and purposes for learning English of our students. Today's language classrooms are often described as learner-centred, it is then reasonable to state that catering to their specific needs is of critical importance (Seedhouse, 1995). This could be the vocabulary, grammar structure, a particular subskill, or any feature of the lesson that the learner would benefit from so that they can use the language. Not only should teachers think about the usability of the language for their students, but ideally, learners should also consider how usable the language is to their own situation as this increases motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013, p 16). This of course, depends on the individual learner, it could be to pass a test, to help them integrate into a host or foreign culture, or simply due to personal interest.

Customizability

Customizability in game design, or in other words the ability for game players to customize the game to their own playing styles and interests, is similar to the concept of learner autonomy in language learning, which was originally presented by Holec (1981). Learner autonomy, which Benson (2013) defines as a “capacity to control important aspects of one’s language learning” (p. 839), is an important part of language teaching and learning. Autonomous learners, according to Little (2003), take responsibility for their own learning by taking a role in goal setting, designing and implementing learning activities, and evaluating their own progress.

Little highlights three reasons why teachers should encourage their students to be autonomous learners. First, time spent learning is more focused and efficacious when students are reflecting on their learning because what students choose to learn is likely to relate to their personal interests and goals. Second, autonomous learners are more likely to be motivated. Third, by using language in spontaneous communication, autonomous learners are able to broaden their range of discourse.

The traditional view of a classroom and learning experience for the student is very much top down, teacher driven, and passive for the learner. In a way, the traditional classroom is like going to the cinema; the audience, or learner in this situation, has little control over their viewing experience. Whereas today’s pedagogy is abound with notions such as autonomous learning, flipped classroom, and negotiated syllabus, which all highlight the highly customizable nature of learning. So just as customizability is an important concept for game developers to include in their games to provide satisfaction to the users who play the game, learner autonomy is an essential concept that language teachers should bear in mind when designing and executing activities and lessons that motivate and enable students to take an interest and responsibility in their own language learning.

Interaction

Interaction is another important attribute of both game playability and language learning. Socialization and interaction amongst players is one of the key attributes of playability identified by Sánchez et al. (2012). Multiplayer games that include communication mechanisms (text, voice, and video/voice calls) allow players to work in competition or in tandem to complete shared objectives. This socialization and interaction amongst players increases the playability of the game

and makes playing the game rewarding, challenging, and fun. This same idea that interaction between players to achieve shared goals will lead to a better PX, can also be found in language teaching. The importance of interaction in completing shared goals and objectives can be found in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is one the most common language teaching methodologies used today. Consider several of the core assumptions of CLT as explained by Richards (2006, pp. 22-23):

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning...and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
3. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

Both Sánchez et al. (2012) and Richards (2006) identify interaction, meaningful communication, and collaboration as essential concepts in their respective fields. Similar to how socialization and interaction in completing shared goals improves the PX of gamers, including socialization and interaction in the language classroom will improve the LX of language learners.

Materials

When playing a video game, the quality of the graphics and sounds are a crucial element of playability (Sanchez et al., 2012) due to the audiovisual elements of a game being “tied to functional playability as interface aspects can directly relate to input controls and feedback of the game” (Nacke, 2009, p. 11). Additionally, quality audiovisuals can immerse the player in the game environment (Ermi and Mayra, 2005), making them more likely to continue playing.

In language teaching, the audiovisual elements of a lesson can be the materials used. How ‘playable’ these are depends on a number of categories, for example technical details. These can be obvious things such as the image quality of the video, the sound quality of the audio, but also includes things like font and text size. If the picture or sound quality is bad, maybe due to printing issues or poor speakers, then it stands to reason the learners will have a harder time understanding the language and the playability of the lesson will be low. This is especially im-

portant in testing situations as it has been shown that the audio quality of a recording has a direct impact on students' scores (Yang, 2009).

The appeal and interest of the materials used in language learning is also important. Studies have shown that teachers believe interesting visuals aid language learning in areas such as vocabulary (Yunus et al., 2013), by incorporating audio-visual elements into a lesson students motivation to engage with the lesson will be increased. That said, there is a debate in the literature as to how 'interesting materials' gain this property. It could be from the learner, who brings interest to the material, it could be from the intrinsic nature of the material, or it could be from the psychological engagement of the learner with the task (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013, p. 26). Nevertheless, the origin of 'interest' seems secondary to the teacher in the classroom, the fact remains that interesting materials increase learner motivation (Dubin & Olshtain, 2002, p. 103) and therefore influences a critical factor of the rate and success of language learning (Dörnyei, 2009).

In summary, materials for language teaching have long been evaluated and developed with the audiovisual criterion in mind. It's important to state that different authors and publishers have different beliefs about what constitutes a 'good' language learning material, nevertheless, they "need to recognize that layout, format, typography and graphics are also essential for a successful coursebook" and that "it is now widely felt that colourful, motivating and accessible materials can legitimately be demanded" (Sheldon, 1987). Therefore, when preparing a lesson, attention needs to be paid to the presentation of the language.

Now that the connections between playability and language teaching and learning have been summarized, it's time to look at how playability can be used as a framework for self-reflection exercises for the professional development of language teachers.

Using Playability as a Framework for Self-Reflection, Peer-Review, and Student Feedback

Richards and Lockhart (2007) argue that without critical reflection gaining teaching experience will not necessarily lead to teacher development. Teachers that do reflect on their experience in the classroom "are in a position to discover whether there is a gap between what they teach and what their learners learn"

(Richards & Lockhart, 2007, p.4). We propose four self-reflective activities, a method of teaching peer-review, and a form for students evaluations of teachers, all couched in the framework of game playability. Teachers who engage in the following reflective activities should first have a basic understanding of the important factors that influence playability described in this article (pace, usability, customizability, socialization and interaction, and quality of materials).

Self-reflection activity 1: Playability Likert scales and associated questions

Reflect for a moment on a recent activity, task, project, or lesson. Using the following Likert scales and questions as a guide, consider how the pace, usability, customizability, intensity of interaction, and quality in print/audio/visual materials affected the overall playability of the activity, project, or lesson.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| The pace of the activity, task, project, or lesson was appropriate for the students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Students were able to successfully use the vocabulary, grammar, or other language that the activity, task, project, or lesson was aimed at teaching. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Students customized the activity, project, task, or lesson to their interests and/or needs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The activity, task, project, or lesson was successful in encouraging and enabling interaction and communication amongst students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The activity, project, or lesson had good quality print/audio/visual materials . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

1. What, if anything, made the pace too fast or too slow? How could you modify the activity, task, project, or lesson for future use?
2. What, if anything, prevented students from being able to use the vocabulary, grammar, or other language that the activity, task, project, or lesson

was aimed at teaching? (For example: poor instructions, tasks were too complex, materials were not appropriate to student levels, etc.) How could you modify the activity, project, or lesson for future use?

3. What, if anything, prevented students from customizing and tailoring the activity, task, project, or lesson to their interests and/or needs? How could you modify the activity, task, project, or lesson for future use?
4. What, if anything, made interaction and communication amongst students difficult? How could you modify the activity, task, project, or lesson for future use?
5. What print/audio/visual materials were lacking in quality? Why? How could you modify the activity, task, project, or lesson to have better quality materials for future use?

Self-reflection activity 2: Questions to ask and reflection flow chart

1. Was that lesson, activity, or task playable?
2. Were there any aspects of the pace, customizability, degree of interaction, or quality of materials used in the lesson that made students confused or disinterested?
3. What can be done to make the lesson, task, or activity more playable next time?

Figure 1 below illustrates one possible way to use playability as a framework for self-reflection soon after a lesson, task, or activity has been completed.

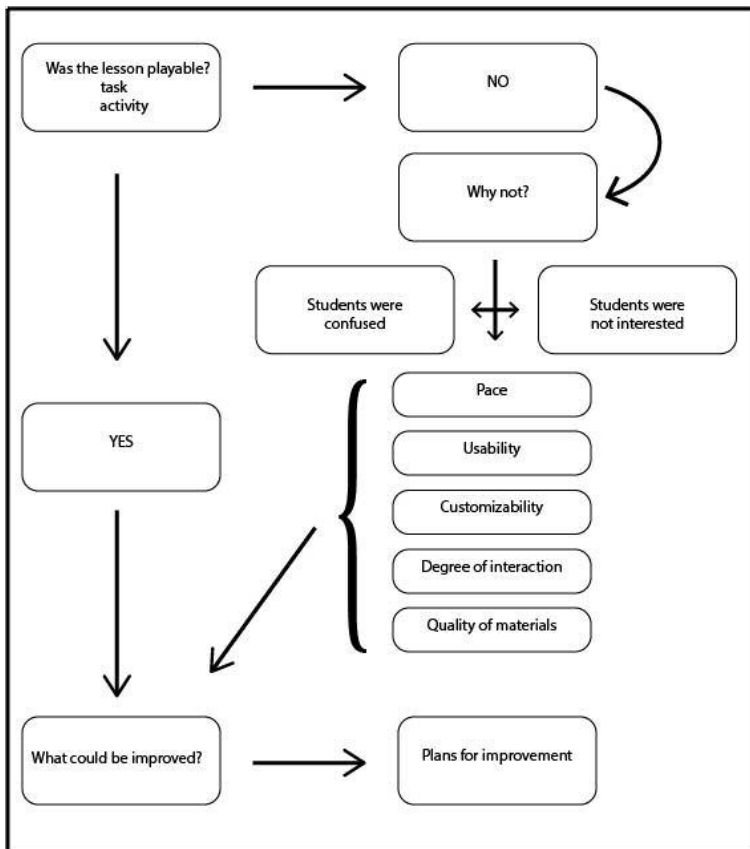


Figure 1. Post lesson self-reflection flowchart.

Self-reflection Activity 3: Playability in teaching - Self-reflection checklist

A quick and easy way for teachers to use playability as a framework for self-reflection is the Playability in Teaching Self Reflection Checklist (see Appendix A). This self-reflection checklist follows the same idea of the post lesson self-reflection flowchart mentioned above, but provides more structure for self-reflection. Teachers can, in a very short time, go through the checklist to see if their activity, task, or lesson matched the core components of playability (pace, usability, cus-

tomizability, interaction, and materials). The checklist also contains guiding questions to help teachers identify how they could improve their activity, task, or lesson and make it more playable or learnable.

Self-reflection Activity 4: General reflective discussion questions

The following discussion questions could be used by teachers on their own or in groups: Reflect on your experience of playing board games or video games.

1. What game did you like to play?
2. What was it about the game that attracted you?
3. How did the pace, usability, customizability, intensity of interaction, and the degree of realism and quality of graphics and sound influence the playability of the game?
4. What, in your opinion, is the relation between playing and learning?
5. How do pace, usability, customizability, intensity of interaction, and quality of materials affect the learning experience of students?
6. What do you think makes an activity or lesson have good playability?
7. Consider a recent activity or task in your language classroom. Was the activity or task playable? Why or why not?

Teaching Peer Review

In addition to serving as a framework for self-reflection, playability can also be used to provide a structured approach for peer-observations. The Playability in Teaching- Teaching Peer-Review form (see Appendix B) is a modified version of the Teaching Self-Reflection Checklist and provides a way for teachers to evaluate and make comments on the teaching of their peers, within the framework of playability. This peer-review form has the same format as the Teaching Self-Reflection Checklist and is organized by pace, usability, customizability, degree of interaction and the quality of materials. Each section has guiding questions to help the reviewer use playability as a framework for their peer-observation.

Student Evaluation of Teaching Activity/Task

Another way that playability might be used as a framework for professional development is having teachers ask their students to evaluate an activity or task based on its pace, usability, customizability, degree of interaction, and quality of materials. The Student Evaluation from (see Appendix C) is a simplified ver-

sion of the Self-Reflection checklist and contains simplified questions for students to evaluate the quality of an activity or lesson. Feedback received from students completing this form may give teachers ideas as to what needs to be improved in their teaching or how to make an activity more interesting and learnable for their students.

Conclusion

This paper has conducted an interdisciplinary analysis exploring the possible connections between game development and language teaching, specifically addressing the similarities that may exist between playability and learnability. Furthermore, this paper has presented four self-reflective activities, a method of teaching peer-review, and a form for student evaluations of teachers, all couched in the framework of game playability. Using the concept of game playability as a framework for self-reflection may help teachers to connect together the many different yet important concepts of language teaching and learning. Playability can serve as the central concept that allows analyses of pace, usability, learner autonomy, learner interaction, and quality of materials to all come together, enabling language teachers to reflect on the language teaching and learning experiences of their classrooms more holistically.

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Sam Newbould is an English language tutor at Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University, Suzhou, China. He has experience of teaching learners from a range of backgrounds and differing abilities. Sam's professional interests include English for Academic Purposes, language teaching methodology, and curriculum design.

Appendix A

Playability in Teaching – Self Reflection Checklist

Pace

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| Time allowed for the learning objectives to be covered in class | | | |
| Each task had sufficient time – not too long so students were bored / not too short students were rushed | | | |

If you answered ‘somewhat’ or ‘no’, why? Reflect below:

Why couldn’t you cover the learning objectives? What made the pace too slow or too fast? How could you modify this for future use?

Usability

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|---|-----|----------|----|
| The learning objectives matched those of the curriculum / syllabus | | | |
| Language / tasks had a real relation to students’ needs | | | |
| Language / tasks / materials were at the right level for the students – not too easy / not too hard | | | |
| Students could clearly understand the instructions for the task | | | |

If you answered ‘somewhat’ or ‘no’, why? Reflect below:

Why didn’t the learning objectives match the syllabus? Why didn’t the language/task match the students’ needs? Why was it too hard/easy? Why didn’t the students understand? How could you modify this for future use?

Customizability

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| Students had an opportunity to personalize learning objectives | | | |
| Students had an opportunity to personalize the language / task | | | |
| Students had the opportunity to reflect on their own learning | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why? Reflect below:

Why didn't the students have an opportunity to personalize objectives/tasks? Why couldn't students reflect on their own learning? How could you modify this for future use?

Interaction

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|---|-----|----------|----|
| Learning objectives / task of the lesson facilitated meaningful interaction | | | |
| A variety of interaction patterns occurred in the lesson | | | |
| Tasks offered opportunity for collaboration and sharing | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why? Reflect below:

Why didn't the objective/task facilitate meaningful interaction? Why couldn't a variety of interaction patterns have been used? Why didn't tasks offer opportunities for students to work together? How could you modify this for future use?

Materials

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| Materials facilitated and were relevant to the learning objectives of the lesson | | | |
| The materials were of a good enough quality (clear printing, clear sound etc.) that students could easily use them | | | |
| Materials were interesting to the students | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why? Reflect below:

Why didn't the materials facilitate the learning objectives? Why weren't the materials of good quality? Why weren't the materials interesting? How could you modify this for future use?

Appendix B**Playability in Teaching – Teacher peer-review****Pace**

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| Time allowed for the learning objectives to be covered in class | | | |
| Each task had sufficient time – not too long so students were bored / not too short students were rushed | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why? Reflect below:

Why couldn't you cover the learning objectives? What made the pace too slow or too fast? How could you modify this for future use?

Usability

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|---|-----|----------|----|
| The learning objectives matched those of the curriculum / syllabus | | | |
| Language / tasks had a real relation to students' needs | | | |
| Language / tasks / materials were at the right level for the students – not too easy / not too hard | | | |
| Students could clearly understand the instructions for the task | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why? Reflect below:

Why didn't the learning objectives match the syllabus? Why didn't the language/task match the students' needs? Why was it too hard/easy? Why didn't the students understand? How could you modify this for future use?

Customizability

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| Students had an opportunity to personalize learning objectives | | | |
| Students had an opportunity to personalize the language / task | | | |
| Students had the opportunity to reflect on their own learning | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why? Reflect below:

Why didn't the students have an opportunity to personalize objectives/tasks? Why couldn't students reflect on their own learning? How could you modify this for future use?

Interaction

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|---|-----|----------|----|
| Learning objectives / task of the lesson facilitated meaningful interaction | | | |
| A variety of interaction patterns occurred in the lesson | | | |
| Tasks offered opportunity for collaboration and sharing | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why? Reflect below:

Why didn't the objective/task facilitate meaningful interaction? Why couldn't a variety of interaction patterns have been used? Why didn't tasks offer opportunities for students to work together? How could you modify this for future use?

Materials

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| Materials facilitated and were relevant to the learning objectives of the lesson | | | |
| The materials were of a good enough quality (clear printing, clear sound etc.) that students could easily use them | | | |
| Materials were interesting to the students | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why? Reflect below:

Why didn't the materials facilitate the learning objectives? Why weren't the materials of good quality? Why weren't the materials interesting? How could you modify this for future use?

What went well during the lesson?

What could be improved?

Appendix C

Student Evaluation

Pace

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| Time allowed for the learning objectives to be covered in class | | | |
| Each task had sufficient time – not too long so students were bored / not too short students were rushed | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why?

Why couldn't the teacher cover the learning objectives? What made the pace too slow or too fast? How could the pace or speed of the lesson be improved?

Usability

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| Language / tasks had a real relation to your needs | | | |
| Language / tasks / materials were at the right level for you – not too easy / not too hard | | | |
| You clearly understood the instructions for the task | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why?

Why didn't the language/task match your needs? Why was it too hard/easy? Why didn't you understand the task?

Customizability

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|---|-----|----------|----|
| You had an opportunity to personalize learning objectives | | | |
| You had an opportunity to personalize the language / task | | | |
| You had the opportunity to reflect on your own learning | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why?

Why didn't you have an opportunity to personalize objectives/tasks? Why couldn't you reflect on your own learning?

Interaction

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| A variety of interaction patterns occurred in the lesson or activity | | | |
| Tasks offered opportunity for collaboration and sharing | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why

Why couldn't a variety of interaction patterns have been used? Why didn't tasks offer opportunities for you to work with other students? Would you like more interaction or less interaction during the activity or task?

Materials

| | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|--|-----|----------|----|
| You could easily understand and use the materials | | | |
| The materials were of a good enough quality (clear printing, clear sound etc.) | | | |
| Materials were interesting to you | | | |

If you answered 'somewhat' or 'no', why?

Why weren't the materials easily understandable or usable? Why weren't the materials of good quality? Why weren't the materials interesting? How could the materials be improved?

What went well during the lesson?

What could be improved?

Online Resources for Learners and Teachers of English Language Pronunciation

by Lynn Henrichsen, Katie Devenport Blanco, Sofía Carreño, Steven Carter, Laura Decker, Leanna Fry, Judy James, Mariah Krauel, Yuting Ruby Li, Vadym Malyshkevich, Rachel Messenger, Alhyaba Moore, Ana-Lisa Mullen, Jeff Peterson, Jared Sell, Chirstin Stephens, Kaitlyn Van Wagoner, Alison Young, Ksenia Zhao

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Introduction and Rationale

While the prominence of computer assisted pronunciation teaching (CAPT) is increasing in the field of L2 pronunciation teaching and learning (Chun, 2013; Fouz-González, 2015; Gómez Lacabex & Gallardo del Puerto, 2014; O'Brien & Levis, 2017), CAPT is not new. Over a decade ago, Levis (2007) noted,

The use of computers is almost ideally suited to learning pronunciation skills. Computers can provide individualized instruction, frequent practice through listening discrimination and focused repetition exercises, and automatic visual support that demonstrates to learners how closely their own pronunciation approximates model utterances. (p. 184)

After reviewing research studies in this area, Levis (2007, p. 185) concluded “that CAPT, when constructed wisely, can be both effective and flexible in addressing pronunciation instruction.” Expressing a similar sentiment, Neri, Cucchiarini, Strik, and Boves (2002, p. 441) stated that CAPT “can be beneficial to second language learning as it provides a private, stress-free environment in which students can access virtually unlimited input, practice at their own pace and, through the integration of Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR), receive individualized, instantaneous feedback.” Fouz-González (2015, p. 316) extended the listing of “ways in which pronunciation training can be advanced” through the use of computers to include perceptual enhancement (via increased input availability, auditory enhancement, and visuals). He praised CAPT features that provide visual enhancement of speech via displays showing pitch contours, waveforms, spectrographic displays, formant data, and animated mouth movements, as well as automatic speech recognition (ASR) software. Likewise, Chun (2013) described promising CAPT tools,

such as visual acoustic displays (i.e., waveforms and spectrograms), visual articulatory displays (i.e., sagittal section diagrams and still and video pictures of a speaker's mouth and lip movements), and ASR. Likewise, Fouz-González (2015) praised CAPT features that provide visual enhancement of speech via displays showing pitch contours, waveforms, spectrographic displays, formant data, and animated mouth movements, as well as ASR software.

A decade or more ago, the computer assistance for pronunciation teaching and learning came mostly in the form of software mounted on desktop computers (Healey, 2002). Since then, however, “technological advances have provided a range of tools to assist learners in the development of pronunciation skills in a variety of target languages” (Hardison, 2009, p. 2). Researchers have investigated and advocated CAPT instructional procedures such as podcasting (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009), cued pronunciation readings (Tanner & Landon, 2009), and shadowing (Foote & McDonough, 2017), and computer technology options have expanded to include online resources and mobile applications.

In fact, “the market penetration of smartphones and tablets has been very fast and widespread” (Rosell-Aguilar, 2017, p. 243), and more and more language learners and teachers are coming to rely on online resources and mobile apps to help them develop their English language knowledge and skills. The reasons are many. “Web-based programs and mobile apps that claim to improve learners’ pronunciation are readily accessible and most are relatively inexpensive” (O’Brien & Levis, 2017, p. 1). “Because of their game-like appearance and their high accessibility, they represent a great asset for the average FL learner, allowing students to practice autonomously on different mobile devices (smart-phones, tablets) and receive immediate feedback based on the choices they make” (Fouz-González, 2015, p. 332).

Quite a few helpful websites and mobile applications have been developed to help ESL/EFL learners (and their teachers) with different aspects of English—including pronunciation. Unfortunately, some less helpful websites and apps also exist. For this reason, as CAPT experts have long insisted...

Teachers and learners should not be seduced by the strong appeal of the marketing done by publishers. Instead, it is necessary to analyze English as a Foreign Language and/or Second Language (EFL/ESL) pronunciation teaching software programs as to their potential for developing English pronunciation. There is an unquestionable need to

analyze these programs from a critical perspective using pedagogically coherent and technically elaborated criteria. (Navarro, 1999, as cited in Martins, Levis, & Borges, 2016, p. 142)

Addressing the shortcomings of much CAPT software, Levis (2007) noted that...

Some of the difficulties that CAPT has faced are pedagogical, some are technological, and some are related to teacher preparedness. Pedagogically, a significant gap often exists between CAPT applications and goals advocated by current pronunciation theory and pedagogy, such that CAPT applications look suspiciously like traditional, drill-oriented pedagogy in new clothing.... Technologically, CAPT systems often suffer from difficulties in giving learners adequate, accurate feedback and an inability to provide accurate and automatic diagnosis of pronunciation errors. Both of these areas relate to the use of automatic speech recognition (ASR) for accented speech. (p. 185)

Ten years later, O'Brien and Levis repeated this warning: "Many of the commercially available products are often neither pedagogically sound nor informed by research" (2017, p. 1).

Along the same lines, Neri, Cucchiari, Strik, and Boves (2002, p. 441) praised the "wealth of CAPT systems" on the market but added...

When examined carefully...the display of products may not look entirely satisfactory. Many authors describe commercially available programs as fancy-looking systems that may at first impress student and teacher alike, but eventually fail to meet sound pedagogical requirements.... These systems, which do not fully exploit the potentialities of CAPT, look more like the result of a technology push, rather than of a demand pull. (p. 442)

Noting the same weakness of CAPT programs, Wang and Munro (2004) urged,

If CALL is to reach its full potential in L2 pronunciation instruction, it must make use of the knowledge about L2 speech learning that has been derived from empirical research. At present, there is a significant gap between some of the key research findings of laboratory studies

from the past two decades and techniques that have actually been put into practice. (p. 540)

Even the technology behind CAPT software can be found lacking when it is examined carefully. Kim (2006), for instance, examined the reliability of automatic speech recognition (ASR) software designed to teach English pronunciation and found that it was only “mediocre” ($r=0.56$) (p. 327). Kim concluded, “that the present state of technological development falls far below the desired level of accuracy” (p. 330), and added, rather pessimistically but realistically, “ASR pronunciation software is not perfect nor will it be in the immediate future” (p. 331).

Looking at both pedagogical and technological aspects of CAPT software, Neri, Cucchiarini, Strik, and Boves outlined “some basic recommendations for the ideal design of effective pronunciation teaching and learning” materials:

Learning must take place in a stress-free environment in which students can be exposed to considerable and meaningful input, are stimulated to actively practice oral skills and can receive immediate feedback on individual errors. Input should pertain to real-world language situations, it should include multiple-speaker models and it should allow the learner to get a sense of the articulatory movements involved in the production of L2 speech. Oral production should be elicited with realistic material and exercises catering for different learning styles, and should include pronunciation of full sentences. Pertinent and comprehensible feedback should be provided individually and with minimum delay and should focus on those segmental and suprasegmental aspects that affect intelligibility most. (2002, p. 449)

Chun (2013, p. 9) noted that “given the technological capabilities that exist, an ideal CAPT program would combine auditory and visualization features, automatic speech recognition (ASR), and appropriate and accurate feedback.” Fouz-González (2015, p. 324) further specified, “An ideal ASR system would recognize everything the user says, point out those areas that are most problematic (depending on the user’s priorities, be it intelligibility, comprehensibility or accuracy), and then offer explicit feedback indicating how to improve.” He went on to explain, “ASR can be used in CAPT for various purposes: (a) to convert speech into text, which allows users to get an idea of what the machine understands and what it does not..., (b) to react to what users say in a simulated conversation and continue

the conversational path depending on the users' answers..., or (c) as a means of pronunciation scoring, ideally offering learners feedback on 'how well' they pronounce the foreign language."

Over 25 years ago, Yule, Hoffman, and Damico (1987) and Morley (1991) argued for greater learner responsibility, autonomy, and self-monitoring in L2 pronunciation learning. More recently and in the context of using ASR in CAPT, McCrocklin (2016) made a similar case, that "students need skills and strategies that will empower them to practice their pronunciation on their own, so that they will not be as reliant on a teacher or school for pronunciation training. In effect, students need to learn to become autonomous learners of pronunciation" (p. 25). "Online resources and software are tools that can promote autonomy by enabling experimentation through self-access work outside of class while also providing immediate feedback to learners" (p. 27). Elsewhere McCrocklin (2015, p. 127) reasoned that ASR held great potential in this regard: "Feedback is vital to the success of autonomous learning outside of the classroom.... One technology that can help provide feedback in Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR), which allows students to experiment with the [target] language in a safe, private setting [and]... to practice at their own speed, getting feedback from the words recognized."

Unfortunately, few CAPT programs measure up to all these criteria and expectations—especially those that are offered online or as mobile apps. Recently, Kaiser (2017) reported on his analysis of 30 L2 pronunciation teaching/learning apps. He found that 22 of the 30 apps (73.3%) relied heavily on an outdated listen-and-repeat instructional approach and provided no feedback to learners. Some apps provided visual feedback in the form of spectrograms. Others, using automatic-speech-recognition software, provided simplistic "right" or "wrong" feedback that was not always accurate. ASR software has apparently still not reached the point where it provides reliable feedback to L2 learners and "has a way to go before meeting [the above noted] goals" (Chun, 2013, p. 9).

"One limitation of ASR is that this technology still cannot reliably recognize spontaneous, natural speech from different speakers" (Cox & Davies, 2012, p. 602). Despite the "great potential for the provision of automatic feedback on learners' pronunciation" that ASR holds, it "needs to improve substantially before learners can use these systems autonomously and rely entirely on their judgments. The effectiveness of these systems decreases significantly when dealing with non-na-

tive speech...and ASR ratings do not always correlate with those by human raters....In spite of advances in the field, an acceptable level of reliability is only guaranteed when the tasks are simple and utterances are kept to a restricted set from which students select a response...something that limits the usability of this technology for spontaneous practice.” Foreign-accented speech produces “numerous false alarms and low rates of correct detection.... The experience may be quite frustrating for users if mistakes are not detected or are detected incorrectly...as the machine is supposed to be an ‘expert’ they can rely on. Once learners suspect the system is not reliable, they will lose confidence in it” (Fouz-González, 2015, p. 328). In fact, inadequate CAPT-ASR software can “lead to frustrating and counter-productive experiences if learners waste time trying to match a model when their pronunciation is already acceptable” (Fouz-González, 2015, p. 327).

For all these reasons—pedagogical and technological—finding the most helpful, top quality, pronunciation-related websites and apps is not easy, despite its importance. Determining which websites and apps are most appropriate for developing which pronunciation skills is even more challenging. A simple Google® search on the term *English pronunciation* produces an overabundance of hits (30,800,000). A narrower search on *English pronunciation exercises* produces 9,100,000 results. Sorting through so many websites is a daunting task. Simply starting with the first ones listed in the search results takes viewers to the most popular sites, but that is no guarantee of those sites’ quality or relevance to a learner’s particular pronunciation problems or pronunciation-improvement goals.

Even when a searcher narrows things down, a wide variety of ESL pronunciation-improvement website *types* will be found, and “there might be pronunciation software programs whose interface may look attractive but fail at reflecting solid grounded principles for teaching pronunciation” (Martins, Levis, & Borges, 2016, p. 143). For instance, some sites and apps provide articulatory explanations but no practice. Others seem intended to be used in conjunction with a teacher or textbook as they provide practice but no explanation or guidance.

Other variables exist in the many online resources for English pronunciation teaching and learning. In terms of monetary cost, some are free, while others require users to pay a membership or subscription fee. Within the domain of pronunciation, some sites focus only on segmentals, others on suprasegmentals, and a rare few provide instruction and practice with both segmentals and supraseg-

mentals. Some provide helpful graphics, others contain only text, and a few even provide video clips to help learners see and hear how to pronounce English sounds correctly. Some pronunciation-related websites and apps expect everyone to follow the same curricular path, while others allow for a more flexible, individualized approach, in which different learners may choose different learning paths. The variety in purposes, instructional approaches, quality, and cost is indeed great—even daunting!

The purpose of this review article is to provide information that will guide teachers and learners of English language pronunciation in selecting the most appropriate and helpful online resources for their learning/teaching needs. Using the above-mentioned variables as well as criteria developed by pronunciation and CALL experts (Derwing & Rossiter, 2002; Martins, Levis, & Borges, 2016; Morley, 1991; Munro & Derwing, 2006; Neri, Cucchiarini, Strik, & Boves, 2002; Rosell-Aguilar, 2017), it provides a collection of 21 brief reviews of pronunciation-oriented websites and apps for English language learners and teachers.

In each review, the author focused on those characteristics that seemed most important and most pertinent to the particular app or website being reviewed. For every review to consider all the many criterion variables described above would have been unwieldy. Further, because many apps or websites cover a variety of proficiency and age levels and can be used for different purposes (e.g., either whole-class instruction or individual self-study), organizing the reviews according to any one of the above-mentioned variables was unworkable. Rather, the simplest approach (i.e., organizing the reviews in alphabetical order according to the products' titles) seemed best.

Finally, the process by which the 21 websites and mobile apps reviewed in this article were selected should be mentioned. They were not selected on the basis of a website/app's popularity or innovativeness; nor were they selected randomly from among the hundreds of CAPT websites and apps that exist. Rather, the reviewers simply made their own selections based on what they found interesting (i.e., innovative, popular, useful, relevant to their own teaching interests, etc.). In some cases, the site/app's prominence or the reviewer's previous contact with it also played a role. This *laissez-faire* process driven by reviewers' varied interests and contacts was admittedly rather haphazard (rather than scientifically random

or systematic). Nevertheless, it naturally resulted in a wide range of different types of online resources being reviewed.

Listing of Websites/Apps Reviewed

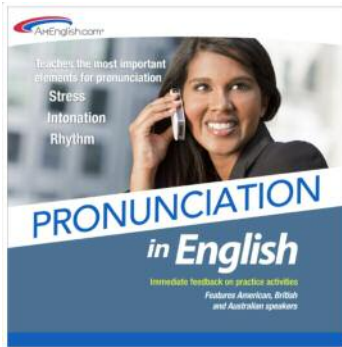
The websites and/or mobile applications reviewed in this article are the following (if you wish, click on the title to go directly to that particular review; click on the <URL> following the title to go directly to the corresponding website):

1. AmEnglish, Pronunciation in English
<http://amenglish.com/products/pronunciation_in_english/pronunciation.html>
2. American English Pronunciation Card and American English Pronunciation Tutor <<http://www.languageartspress.com/pronunciationcard.html>>
3. BBC Learning English <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish>>
4. English Accent Coach <<http://www.englishaccentcoach.com/index.aspx>>
5. English Central <<http://www.EnglishCentral.com>>
6. Fun Easy English: Pronunciation <<http://funeasyenglish.com/new-american-english-pronunciation-introduction.htm>>
7. Juna: Your American Accent Coach <AmericanAccentOnTheGo.com>
8. Mango Languages. <<https://www.mangolanguages.com>>
9. Many Things.org <<http://www.manythings.org/e/pronunciation.html>>
10. One Stop English < <http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/pronunciation/>>
11. Perception of Spoken English (POSE) Test <<https://posetest.com/>>
12. Pronuncian: American English Pronunciation <<https://pronuncian.com>>
13. Pronunciation Doctor <<https://www.youtube.com/user/Pronunciation-Doctor>>
14. Pronunciation for Teachers <pronunciationforteachers.com>
15. Pronunciation Matters <<http://www.pronunciationmatters.com>>
16. Pronunciator <<http://www.pronunciator.com>>
17. Rachel's English <<http://www.rachelsenglish.com>>
18. Reading Horizons English Sounds and Letters <<http://www.readinghorizons.com/esl-reading-instruction/product-overview>> <<https://www.readinghorizons.com/reading-intervention-program/mobile-applications/pronunciation-tool>>

19. Ship or Sheep <www.shiporsheep.com>
20. Sounds of Speech <<http://soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/index.html> - english>
21. Train Your Accent <<http://www.trainyouraccent.com/>>

Each review gives information on the software's sponsor/author, type, source, cost, instructional type, intended audience, objectives, major features, pros, and cons. It ends with a "verdict" (general conclusion) regarding the app or website's overall value. (N.B. Unless otherwise cited, all quoted material within each review comes from the website or app being reviewed.)

AmEnglish.com, Pronunciation in English



Pronunciation in English

Learn to use the important elements of stress, intonation, and rhythm like a native speaker.

Available in two levels

- High Beginning+
- Intermediate+

User Feedback

Buy

Medical

Product Name: *Pronunciation in English*

Reviewer: Alison Young

Author and/or Sponsor: *Pronunciation in English* was created by Kathy L. Hans, founder of AmEnglish.com in collaboration with The Chauncey Group International®, a subsidiary of Educational Testing Service® (ETS).

Software Type and Source: AmEnglish.com products are cloud based, compatible with all browsers, plus suitable for any mobile device. Users purchase an online access package for desired products at http://amenglish.com/products/pronunciation_in_english/pronunciation.html AmEnglish.com acts as its own online store.

Cost: Several options exist for an online subscription to the High Beginning+ and/or Intermediate+ level of *Pronunciation in English*. Users may purchase a one-

level 90-day subscription for \$29.95. Schools or colleges can obtain a one-year 30-workstation license for \$3,000. This option includes access to 17 programs plus step-by-step lesson plans and a User Management System (UMS). A classroom license that includes three programs that can be accessed by up to 30 students in or out of class is also available for only \$650 per year.

Instructional Type: *Pronunciation in English* is an interactive tool designed to improve non-native speakers' stress, rhythm, and intonation skills. Each lesson provides state-of-the-art training, interactive practice, and audio feedback, plus it also assesses learners' progress. Two levels are available (High Beginning+ and Intermediate+) and both are excellent teacher resources, as well as self-paced tutorials for students. Each level also provides in-depth training and practice for students to develop their pronunciation in these three target areas—with or without teacher instruction. In addition, the interactive methodology includes essential audio and visual interfaces for an in-the-classroom feel to instruction.

Intended Users: The target audience for this product includes students at the high-school level and above, teachers of English language learners at any level, distance educators, and individuals who already have, or desire to obtain, employment in the global workplace. Students and/or employees will need a minimum English proficiency level of advanced beginner. More proficient users will likely still benefit from the in-depth training and practice included in the interactive lessons.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: As noted above, *Pronunciation in English* is intended for individuals seeking to improve their English stress, intonation, and rhythm skills.

General description: Each level of *Pronunciation in English* provides over 300 interactive lessons. Users can access cloud-based video presentations to introduce pronunciation concepts and audio clips featuring American, British, and Australian speakers. A recording interface encourages self-monitoring and self-correction. Instructional materials are translated into more than ten languages to facilitate understandability.

Strengths: Students and teachers alike will find the instructional approach very user friendly. Video clips and audio tracks offer media-rich instruction. Scored chapter reviews, hands-on practice, and comprehension checks provide essential feedback. In addition, teachers with site licenses have access to step-by-step lesson

plans and can track student activity with the User Management System (UMS). This system provides information on students' session durations, assessment scores, and more. Corporate (i.e., individual one year) licenses include narrated videos from the developer, Kathy L. Hans, which are distributed weekly via email. Roll over menus make navigation easy.

Weaknesses: Although pricing is reasonable in light of the quantity and quality of the products, potential new users will find it hard to make informed decisions about the products based on the limited information and samples available on the AmEnglish.com website. The one sample lesson plan available for each level of *Pronunciation in English* does clearly indicate the scope and sequence of the methodology, however. There is also an overview slide show accessible online, but I was unable to access it via a mobile device. It is reassuring that both levels of AmEnglish.com's *Pronunciation in English* have been reviewed and recommended by ETS, but it would greatly benefit both teachers and future students to actually experience a sample interactive lesson module and/or the UMS prior to purchase.

Overall Conclusion: Despite my reservations above, I would still highly recommend *Pronunciation in English* as both a student and a teacher resource. The interactive lessons and teacher support make the products a full-service software program ideal for individual as well as classroom use. The User Management System is a definite plus.

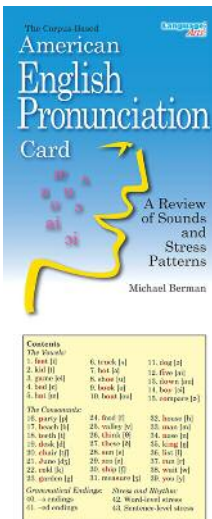
[Return to Listing of Websites/Apps Reviewed](#)

American English Pronunciation Tutor and American English Pronunciation Card



American English Pronunciation Tutor

Mobile App



Vowels

The Front Vowels

feet [i] • kid [ɪ] • game [eɪ]
bed [e] • hat [æ]

These vowel sounds are produced with the tongue forward in the mouth. For each vowel, the tongue is placed at a different height.

1. feet [i]

Practice

- we
- mean
- either
- Chinese
- The three regions achieved peace.

Contrasts

- | | |
|---------|------|
| 1. /i/ | /ɪ/ |
| 2. /eɪ/ | /e/ |
| 3. /æ/ | /eɪ/ |
| 4. /eɪ/ | /e/ |

- I beat my brother.
- I bit my brother.

2. kid [ɪ]

Practice

- is
- give
- busy
- women
- It isn't permitted to begin until six-thirty.

Contrasts

- | | |
|---------|------|
| 1. /i/ | /eɪ/ |
| 2. /e/ | /eɪ/ |
| 3. /æ/ | /eɪ/ |
| 4. /eɪ/ | /e/ |

- The pin is sharp.
- The pain is sharp.

Product Name: *American English Pronunciation Tutor and The Corpus-Based American English Pronunciation Card*

Reviewer: Mariah Krauel

Author and/or Sponsor: Language Arts Press, LLC

Software Type and Source: Mobile iOS app (7.1 or later)—compatible with iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch (Android version under development); website; and

heavy, laminated, 10-1/2" X 24-1/2", sextuple-fold, color-printed, paper card. Available from the Apple App Store, and at <http://www.languageartspress.com/pronunciationcard.html>

Cost: Free for basic app. Upgrade for \$5.99. The card costs \$8.95, plus shipping and handling.

Instructional Type: The mobile app provides four types of interactive exercises designed to develop students' pronunciation. The compact, inexpensive card is a reference tool that provides an overview of the various features of American English that prove challenging to ESL learners. It provides example words (with various spellings of the target sound) accompanied by illustrations of their meanings and the tongue and lip positions for each target sound.

Intended Users: Although content is appropriate for all proficiency levels, instructions are targeted toward at least high beginner English language learners.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: The objective of the app/card is to provide clear and engaging pronunciation instruction. The app has interactive exercises intended to help learners develop clear, confident speech and master key aspects of English pronunciation. The card serves mostly as a reference tool that can be used without accessing an electronic device. Key aspects include pronunciation of vowel and consonant sounds, accuracy and awareness of grammatical endings, word-level stress, and sentence-level stress and rhythm.

General description: The card provides a review of sounds and stress patterns with multiple examples and tongue/mouth positions for the target sounds. The app then provides 10 interactive units that guide users through the pronunciation topics to improve pronunciation, fluency, and grammatical awareness. Exercises include practice, where words and short sentences are practiced and compared with recordings; contrasts, where learners listen and repeat minimal pairs; listening quizzes, where learners identify words/sentences they hear; and speech recognition, where learners test their progress and are assessed on clarity and comprehensibility.

Strengths: As a teacher, I find this reference card and app to be very beneficial. They provide a clear overview of pronunciation and possible tools to help students improve. They are a great supplement to course instruction and are easy to use. Teachers can use the card during face-to-face instruction. Students can use

the app to complete the lessons at their own pace, receive immediate feedback, and continue to review the sounds and patterns.

Weaknesses: The app is free for the first few units; however, to have access to the other lessons, users must purchase the “pro” version for \$5.99. Although interactive, the app is linear and builds on itself, which may hinder spontaneous practice and retention. The instructions for both app and card are also too complex for English learners at lower levels of proficiency.

Overall Conclusion: Although the free app is limited, the content is clear and concise. It is a much-needed resource for pronunciation practice, especially for students at the higher levels who can practice more on their own. The card is a great tool to supplement class time, providing clear explanations for teachers to present and examples for students to practice. I strongly recommend these resources for teachers who would like to incorporate pronunciation more in their instruction.

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BBC Learning English



The screenshot shows the BBC Learning English website interface. At the top, there is a search bar and a navigation menu. The main heading is "LEARNING ENGLISH" with the tagline "INSPIRING LANGUAGE LEARNING SINCE 1943". Below this, there is a navigation bar with options like "Courses", "Features", and "Pronunciation". The "Pronunciation" section is highlighted, and the main heading is "The Sounds of English" with a sub-heading "INTERMEDIATE LEVEL". Below this, there is a large graphic with the number "3" and a downward-pointing triangle, and a smaller graphic with the text "Long Vowels - Programme 5".

Product Name: *BBC Learning English: Pronunciation*

Reviewer: Kaitlyn VanWagoner

Author and/or Sponsor: BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)

Software Type and Source: Website and mobile app for iOS and Android. Content is limited on mobile applications. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning-english> as well as in the Apple App Store and Google Play Store.

Cost: There is no cost to use this website or download this app. Users may create a BBC ID in order to receive emails updates and save their progress.

Instructional Type: This resource could be a valuable classroom supplement (particularly the listening aspects of the site). It would also be valuable to students wishing to review the sounds of English with visual support.

Intended Users: The pronunciation lessons are labeled as intermediate and would be appropriate for adults at an intermediate, or higher, proficiency level.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: The pronunciation instruction on this site consists of brief, 5-7 minute videos. Each focuses on specific sounds in the following categories: diphthongs, long vowels, short vowels, voiceless consonants, voiced consonants, and other consonants. The videos are sequential and build upon principles presented previously. Each video models the sound, using both audio and visuals. The instructor moves at an appropriate pace, repeating the sounds for clarity, and also describes the movement and shapes of the mouth for proper articulation. The pronunciation modeled is Standard Southern British English.

General Description: The pronunciation component of this website is a minor feature of a larger language learning gold mine. *BBC Learning English's* primary resources consist of authentic listening material. Topics for podcasts (generally very short) include, but are not limited to, colloquialisms, idioms, literature, and current news topics. As noted above, the pronunciation resources are limited to a series of videos teaching the sounds of English for intermediate to advanced English language learners.

Strengths: The videos are very clear to listen to and follow. The close-ups of the mouth to demonstrate each sound are very valuable for students who need visual instruction. The videos also cover a fairly comprehensive range of English sounds. The videos are easy to use and clearly marked. The use of the videos is very flexible. Students working independently, or teachers looking for a particular sound, may go directly to the sound they need without having to work their way through unnecessary material. The overall design is very user friendly and advertisement-free.

Weaknesses: The videos are insufficient independently. Instruction relies on students' having a previous knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet, a hindrance for students unfamiliar with IPA. Also, the videos do not provide much visual reinforcement. For example, the instructor gives examples (*hear, fear*, etc.) but the written words are not shown, so students may see no visual representation of the sound they are learning to say.

Overall Conclusion: This resource is valuable as a supplement or review for advanced students seeking to achieve more comprehensible and native-like pronunciation.

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English Accent Coach



Product Name: *English Accent Coach, EAC Vowels 1, and EAC Echo*

Reviewer: Lynn Henrichsen

Author and/or Sponsor: Ron Thomson, Brock University (with advisory guidance from Tracey Derwing, University of Alberta, and Murray Munro, Simon

Fraser University; and developmental support from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Brock University, and Thuris Media).

Software Type and Source: Website and iOS apps for iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch. Available at <http://www.englishaccentcoach.com/index.aspx>. The *EAC Vowels 1* and *EAC Echo* apps can be purchased from the Apple App Store.

Cost: Access to the *English Accent Coach* website is free (no advertisements but registration is required, although it is possible to play a limited demonstration version as a guest); *EAC Vowels 1* and *EAC Echo* cost \$1.39 each.

Instructional Type: Interactive online games designed to improve users' English pronunciation by giving them practice recognizing English vowels.

Intended Users: Older children, teenagers, and adults at the (ACTFL) Novice-High and higher proficiency levels could play these games, enjoy them, and benefit from them. Even Advanced-level English learners who still have difficulty pronouncing some English vowels correctly could use these games to overcome their particular difficulties. Although these games seem intended for individual use, a creative teacher might be able to use them with a class of English language learners.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: According to the website's home page, *English Accent Coach* "works because it trains the brain to recognize new sounds—an essential foundation for improved pronunciation." In other words, these games are designed to give English learners practice in listening discrimination. Actual production is left for later stages of the language-learning process. Many L2 acquisition researchers would agree with this sequence. For instance, a tenet of Flege's (1995, p. 238) Speech Learning Model is "that many L2 production errors have a perceptual basis." In other words, learners' ability to produce L2 sounds correctly is related to their ability to perceive those same sounds.

General Description: These games all involve the recognition of 10 English vowel phonemes (/i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ɑ/, /ʌ/, /o/, /ʊ/, /u/, /ɔ/, /ə/, /ɜ/, and rhotic vowels like /ɹ/) are not included) in single-word or single-syllable contexts. The *English Accent Coach* website also focuses on 24 consonants (including /θ/ and /ð/, and /tʃ/ and /dʒ/). The *Tour* section takes users to a screen that displays the target vowels or consonants. Clicking on a particular phonetic symbol produces a "pop-up"

window that gives example words, a simplified articulatory description, and a technical IPA description. Learners first listen to the pronunciation of each vowel or consonant by clicking on the IPA symbol on the screen. When they are ready, they can play the game, by reversing the process—clicking on the symbol for the vowel they just heard (or the vowel that was used in a “key word” that they read on the screen). After playing, they can see their score, along with a color-coded guide (green = “mastered,” yellow= “satisfactory,” and red = “needs more practice”) that lets them know where they need to focus their learning efforts in the future. The website also includes the *Echo* game, which is also available in a mobile app (described below).

EAC Vowels 1 is a mobile app modeled after the vowels section of the *English Accent Coach* website. It also provides instruction and practice with three diphthongs (/aj/, /aw/, and /ɔj/).

EAC Echo is like the classic electronic memory game *Simon*. The app plays syllables containing a variety of English vowels and flashes a colored button, starting with only one button but the number increases with each round. The user must touch the corresponding vowel button(s) in the proper order.

Produced in Ontario, Canada, at Brock University (near Toronto), *English Accent Coach* teaches general North American English vowels with a few minor variations. Depending on the difficulty level selected by the user and following a learning model called High Variability Pronunciation Training (HVPT), *EAC Echo* plays slightly different audio versions voiced by various people whose pronunciations vary in natural ways. (For instance, some nasalize their vowels or use an onglide.) At the “Easy” level, to make distinctions easier to perceive, there is a different voice for each of the four vowels. At the “Medium” level, all four vowels are spoken by the same person. At the “Difficult” level, different voices play randomly for every vowel and for every tap-back by the user. Further, each of these three difficulty levels can be made more challenging by turning off the flashing, color visual cues.

Strengths: The game format is *English Accent Coach*’s greatest asset. It provides learners with an unlimited amount of intrinsically rewarding practice. Research has shown the special High Variability Pronunciation Training (HVPT) instructional paradigm to be productive with the learning of L2 vowels (Wang & Munro, 2004). In addition, the visual design is clean and attractive, and navigation

is simple. To adjust to learners at different levels of English proficiency, the programs have settings that allow users to choose the desired level of difficulty, number of words used, and number of attempts they are allowed per sound. *EAC Vowels I* has three levels of difficulty, and *EAC Echo* has six: three “Easy,” “Medium,” and “Hard” settings, each of which can be played with or without visual support. In the “Easy” version, it is possible to win by watching the lights and simply playing visually. In the highest “Hard” setting, however, with the visual cues turned off and different voices speaking each word, selecting the right buttons is much more difficult.

Weaknesses: While the amount of practice provided by these games is a strength, some ESL learners might wish for more guidance in the perception and production of the target vowels and consonants. The only articulatory explanations are buried in the *Tour* section and are easy to overlook. In addition, the games focus exclusively on vowels (and consonants in the website version) and ignore the suprasegmental aspects of English pronunciation—stress, intonation, rhythm, etc.—which are crucial to intelligibility. The vowels are limited to ten (plus three diphthongs in the mobile app). While many English vowels are normally diphthongized (e.g., “oh” is pronounced /oʊ/ [or /əʊ/ in British English]), the IPA symbols used in *English Accent Coach* give no indication of this process. All of these scope limitations might be the result of deliberate choices of designers wishing to keep things simple for learners and easier to understand, and that simplicity might actually be a program strength. Nevertheless, potential users of *English Accent Coach* should be aware of this aspect of the software’s design. Of course, another glaring instructional gap is the fact that *English Accent Coach*’s focus is entirely on listening discrimination. Users don’t have to pronounce anything to win the game; they merely listen and select the right buttons. Finally, all practice involves sounds in single-word or syllable contexts only.

Overall Conclusion: User friendly software that makes pronunciation learning enjoyable and rewarding is definitely welcome. Learners (and teachers) who recognize that the correct perception of new sounds is a necessary precondition to correct production of those sounds will be pleased with the foundation that *English Accent Coach* provides to ESL learners. It’s unfortunate that the phonological scope of these programs is restricted to vowels (and consonants) only. While that design decision was probably deliberate and the designers did not intend to produce

an “all-in-one” instructional solution to the full range of ESL learners’ pronunciation challenges, we can only hope that a future version of *English Accent Coach* will use the same, successful, game-like instructional design and HVPT approach to teach suprasegmentals.

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English Central

Product Name: *English Central*

Reviewer: Alhyaba Moore

Author and/or Sponsor: English Central, Inc.

Software Type and Source: Website, mobile app for iOS and Android. Available at <http://www.englishcentral.com>; also available from the Apple App Store and Google Play Store.

Cost: \$15/month-\$130/month depending on the number of live lessons learners want and yearly vs. monthly payments. Individual quotes for institutions are also available.

Instructional Type: Video-based articulatory explanations and examples of various pronunciation difficulties experienced by English language learners, followed by practice activities.

Intended Users: Adult learners at most levels.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: *English Central* presents both teachers and learners with a polished, ad-free resource for pronunciation improvement, as well as other aspects of English language learning.

General description: *English Central's* activities revolve around short video clips graded for difficulty. More advanced videos tend to contain more academic vocabulary, while beginner and intermediate-level videos contain simpler language, as well as subtitles in the learners' native tongue. All videos include English captions. *English Central* contains several pronunciation-specific resources, such as video lessons demonstrating the pronunciation of individual English phonemes in depth. The production of the target sound is described and then demonstrated both visually and aurally, in isolation and in context. A sagittal cross-section of the human speech apparatus making the sound is also shown. Next the video highlights a useful feature. Then, learners are asked to speak into their computer microphone and practice making the sound they just learned about. This feature is also available in other short clips in which students are asked to repeat key words and phrases. Another valuable feature is the ability to receive short, individual lessons with the company's tutors. Learners can easily open an account with English Central by linking with their Facebook or email account. After creating an account, they select their native language, and take a short assessment to determine their level. After joining, they can also take a diagnostic test in order to discover their precise proficiency level within the site. Learners are then able to choose lessons and videos appropriate for their level. Once learners choose a video, they watch it three times. The first time, they simply watch and read the captions. The second time, several key words and phrases are missing from the captions and learners type them in. The third time, learners repeat the line containing the key word into the computer's microphone. After watching the video, learners can choose to "go live" and speak to a tutor about the video.

Strengths: Segmentals are thoroughly discussed and practiced, and speaking practice is abundant. Further, the website contains modern, genuine clips of movies and presents a few varieties of English. In addition, individual feedback from tutors

is available, learners can use the same site for all aspects of English learning, and the site and app track learners' progress and history.

Weaknesses: Unfortunately, no videos teach or make mention of suprasegmentals. Also, the ability of the site to give valuable pronunciation feedback is questionable. When speaking into the microphone, a letter grade and number of points are awarded. However, there is no feedback as to what the speaker must change in order to receive a higher score. Finally, learners must purchase a membership to access most of the site's features.

Overall conclusion: If learners are looking for a professional and fun site for general English-learning, *English Central* is a solid paid option. The videos and activities are motivating, and learners' progress can be seen and tracked. The opportunity to interact with live tutors also gives learners conversation practice not typically available through individual online study. However, if learners are looking only for pronunciation-specific resources, they might fare better by saving some money and looking elsewhere.

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Fun Easy English: Pronunciation and Reductions

Product Name: *Fun Easy English: Pronunciation and Fun Easy English: Reductions*

Reviewer: Lynn Henrichsen

Author and/or Sponsor: Howie Hayman

Software Type and Source: Website at <http://funeasyenglish.com/new-american-english-pronunciation-introduction.htm> and <http://funeasyenglish.com/new-american-english-reductions-reduced-words-introduction.htm>.

Cost: Free (no advertisements).

Instructional Type: Student (or teacher) resource that provides articulatory explanations, model words, and imitative practice for English vowels, consonants, and reductions.

Intended Users: Low-proficiency-level, child (or adult) learners of English.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: Intelligible production of American English vowels and consonants in single-word contexts. Recognition of rudimentary connections between English spelling and pronunciation. “Natural” pronunciation of English reductions such as *whassup*, *gonna*, *gimme*, and *betcha*. Ultimately, the website explains, the goal is intelligibility, so that “people understand what you’re saying the first time.”

General Description: *Pronunciation and Reductions* are two sections of the larger *Fun, Easy English* website that also has sections on English grammar and “classroom” language learning activities (365 mini-lessons, one for every day of the year). The *Pronunciation* section includes 44 lessons—20 on vowels and 24 on consonants. Each of these lessons is presented via a short (approximately three-minute) video that (1) introduces the target sound, (2) provides a few sample words that use the sound, (3) explains how the sound is spelled, (4) shows a sagittal-section diagram indicating the position of the articulatory organs when making this sound, (5) explains whether the sound is voiced or unvoiced, (6) describes the position of the mouth, lips, and tongue, and (7) pronounces a few model words for the student to imitate. An introductory video provides a few simple hints for practice pronunciation. The *Reductions* section focuses on the “reduced forms of English words” and explains, “You need to use reductions when you speak English in order to sound more natural” and “to understand conversations between native English speakers.” The presentation of the targeted reductions is organized by their lexico-grammatical constructions. For example, one subsection is titled *what+is+word* and teaches reductions like *whatsiz* (*What is his...*); another is titled *word+you* and teaches reductions like *gotcha* (*got you*).

Strengths: Using *Fun, Easy English* costs nothing, and there are no distracting advertisements. The introduction emphatically declares the importance of pronunciation, explaining, “Knowing a lot of vocabulary, and using perfect grammar MEANS NOTHING if nobody can understand you. Pronunciation is the most important part of your English language study.” In the videos, the teacher/presenter (“Mr. Howie”) uses simple, slow speech that is intended to be easy for low-level English learners to comprehend. In addition, his speech is supported by written captions, in case learners still have trouble understanding what he says. To appeal to younger learners, the visual design of *Fun, Easy English* is light-hearted, with “alphabet-block” letters, simple cartoons, lots of photos, and a “toilet seat” mouth. The author attempts to make the video presentations entertaining by wearing odd clothing and including strange, puppet characters, like “Mr. A. Lee En” (who speaks like an alien robot).

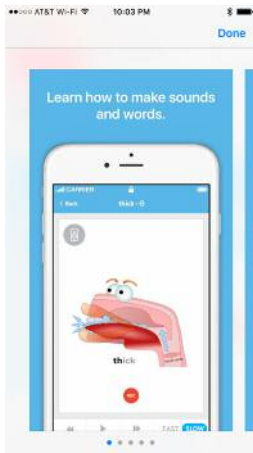
Weaknesses: The *Pronunciation* section focuses on segmentals (vowels and consonants) only. No mention is made of important suprasegmental features of English (stress, intonation, rhythm, etc.). All presentations and practice exercises are limited to the single-word level. No sentences or larger contexts are used. Learners do not need to understand the meaning of the words they are repeating and no attempt is made to convey their meaning. The videos (many of which were made nearly ten years ago) seem “home-made” (rudimentary and unprofessional). The hints for practicing pronunciation are so simple as to be useless (e.g., “Practice pronunciation in front of a mirror,” or “Remember the spelling of words and their pronunciation are often different.”) No mention is made of more modern or helpful metacognitive or motivational strategies for pronunciation improvement. The author (Howie Hayman) holds a degree in business administration and a TEFL certificate. His lack of advanced training in linguistics, phonetics, language learning psychology, and pronunciation instruction is evident in many of the explanations. For instance, he never mentions simple but powerful phonological rules (such as palatal assimilation or unstressed vowel reduction) when teaching reductions. He merely presents models for students to imitate and repeat.

Overall Conclusion: *Fun, Easy English* is one of the few websites that attempts to teach English pronunciation to younger learners. In some ways it probably appeals to children, but its reliance on didactic, articulatory explanations followed by minimal (and meaningless) imitative practice of single words leaves

much to be desired. The *Reductions* section addresses an important aspect of spoken English that is often overlooked by speaking/pronunciation instructors.

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Juna: Your American Accent Coach



Product Name: *Juna: Your American Accent Coach*

Reviewer: Judy James

Author/Developer: Ann Bartholomew/Noble Applications

Software Type and Source: iOS, made for iPhone and iPad; available at <http://AmericanAccentOnTheGo.com>.

Cost: The app and some content is free to explore; a \$4.99 in-app purchase provides the complete American Sounds Content.

Instructional Type: *Juna* is an easy to use app with little need of prompts. It provides supplementary exercises, new and additional information, as well as self-access activities. It allows students to record themselves and compare their recording with the model sound file, and it can be used in small chunks as needed. A teacher could open the app to introduce a sound that students are pronouncing incorrectly so they can see its proper formation. The app could also be assigned as homework for students to self-correct their pronunciation errors, and it could easily be used for pair work during class.

Intended Users: English language learners in general who want to learn, correct, or perfect their own American English pronunciation. In addition, it could be used by a teacher focusing on particular sounds students may need help with.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: *Juna* promotes proper American English pronunciation. It does not promote new language acquisition or novel responses but it does allow for student autonomy and proactive learning. It is interactive and could be used in groups or for individual work. *Juna* provides exercises for more than one learning style, and there is also some room for unintended learning.

General Description: *Juna* shows the inside of the mouth as it makes American English sounds. An animated mouth character, Mimo, demonstrates tongue position, air flow, and movements for each of the sounds. Students practice imitating Mimo by listening and watching. There are also recording features so students can compare their pronunciation to Mimo's, and there are extra videos for the difficult sounds [r], [l], "th," and diphthongs.

Strengths: *Juna* is easy to use and navigate with a "Welcome" section, back button, and menu with video practice and audio practice, as well as how to make sounds, about, and help sections. The app's strongest points are the wide range of sounds included for American English and the option of working with the sounds that the user chooses (without going through the whole program). The user interface is simple, not too complicated, and very user friendly. There are no distracting elements throughout the app.

Weaknesses: A weak point is the animation, which may seem juvenile to some people. Further, *Juna* does not evaluate or provide feedback, but it does allow students to record themselves and compare the recording with the sound file. The app is not modifiable nor does it keep records or provide feedback.

Overall Conclusion: *Juna* is well worth the low \$4.99 purchase cost. It is quick and easy to use, can be pulled out in a classroom for a quick review, and may even be given as homework. The option to try some parts for free is a plus.

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Mango Languages



Product Name: *Mango Languages*

Reviewer: Leanna Fry

Author and/or Sponsor: Mango Languages, Inc.

Software Type and Source: Subscription database, Android and iOS mobile apps. Available at <http://mangolanguages.com>, participating public and school libraries in the United States and Canada, and the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, Amazon Apps Store, and Nook App Store.

Cost: Free at participating libraries; personal subscriptions cost \$20/month.

Instructional Type: Student resource, drills, voice comparison.

Intended Users: Novice learners, school-age to adult; English-learning content generally limited to the basic level.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: Listening perception and speech production.

General Description: *Mango Languages* offers language-learning software for libraries, schools, businesses, governments, and individuals. It is not limited to English as a second/foreign language, as lessons are offered in over 70 languages, with instructions given in English. *Mango Languages* describes its program as “PhD-created and linguist-approved” and is accessible through database

subscription or via a subscription-based downloadable app. Lessons target novice learners, although intermediate English lessons are also offered for Spanish-speakers. Topics focus on functional vocabulary and include greetings, introductions, and shopping. English lessons' vocabulary and pronunciation represent American English, and recordings are spoken by native American English speakers. Instructions for these English lessons, however, are given by native speakers in the user's choice of 18 world languages, including Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese, Turkish, Bengali, and Vietnamese. A microphone is necessary to use the voice comparison feature. The software tracks users' progress through the lessons.

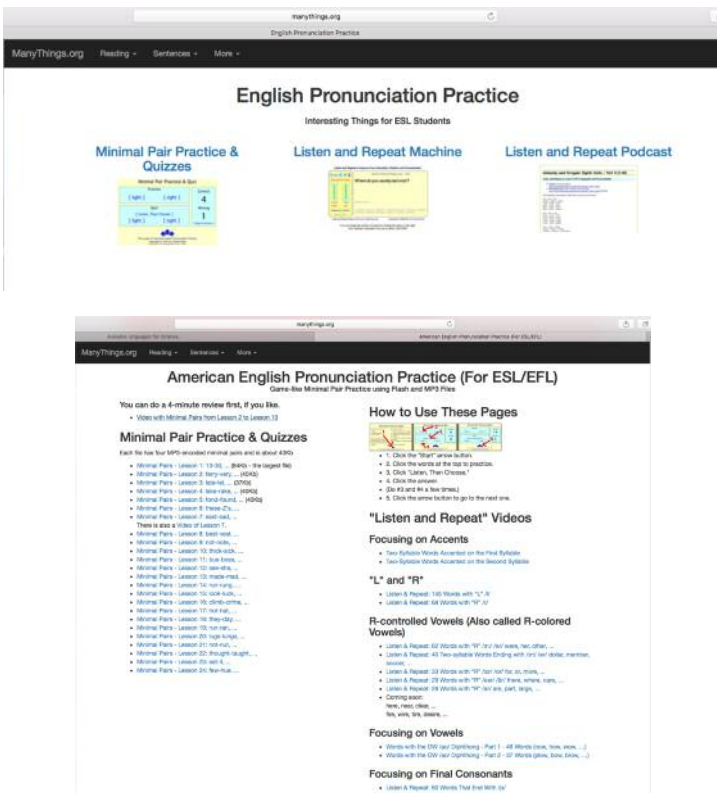
Strengths: *Mango's* primary focus is on speaking and listening, but it also includes a pronunciation element. Native speakers pronounce basic words, and users can click on individual elements of a word to hear a slower pronunciation that includes a transcription in their native alphabets. Voice comparison software allows users to see how their pronunciation compares to a native speaker's.

Weaknesses: Because the cost of an individual subscription could be prohibitive for many English language learners, *Mango* may be more appropriate for use in contexts where learners have free access to it through their local libraries or schools.

Overall Conclusion: For novice learners with access to *Mango*, the product can help learners with their pronunciation of basic vocabulary as it provides opportunities for both input and output. However, due to *Mango's* cost, access to the software may be difficult for most learners.

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ManyThings.org English Pronunciation Practice



Product Name: *Manythings.org English Pronunciation Practice*

Reviewer: Jared Sell

Author and/or Sponsor: Charles and Lawrence Kelly

Software Type and Source: Website (currently being updated to be mobile friendly) at <http://www.manythings.org/e/pronunciation.html>.

Cost: Free (no advertisements).

Instructional Type: Mostly a student resource for drills and some games.

Intended Users: The website doesn't specify level or age for the materials; however, it could be useful at many levels. The Japanese translations that appear occasionally suggest that it was originally designed for Japanese learners of Eng-

lish. While the website includes help for other language skills besides pronunciation, the pronunciation part is the focus of this review.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: This website is intended to help users understand the differences in minimal pairs, utilizing listen-and-repeat practice.

General description: The pronunciation part of this website includes three major sections. The first section, *Minimal Pair Practice & Quizzes*, includes several practices where a student listens, repeats, and then chooses the correct choice of the minimal pairs. Prior to having to choose the correct answer, students may practice listening and repeating as many times as they want. Also inside this section of the website are various videos for listen-and-repeat practice as well as songs, poems, and tongue twisters.

The second section is called the *Listen and Repeat Machine*. Students who use this section may choose to hear a sentence X number of times while also repeating what they hear. There is one page of 50 sentences for each day of the year, so users could potentially use a new practice every day.

Finally, there is a section called the *Listen and Repeat Podcast* where students can listen to a podcast (albeit very short) that is designed to help practice particular points of the language. For example, there is one podcast that helps students learn how to pronounce irregular verbs.

Strengths: One of the strengths of *English Pronunciation Practice* is the amount of practice available. Students would be hard pressed to find something that has more practice than this website. It is unlikely that students will find a place where they can practice pronunciation on something new each day of the year, as this website offers. Another strength is the use of audio and visual components within some of the practices. These components facilitate and add meaning to the practice. Another strength of this website is the fact that it is very flexible. Students don't have to follow a certain order for the activities, which fosters self-regulation in learners.

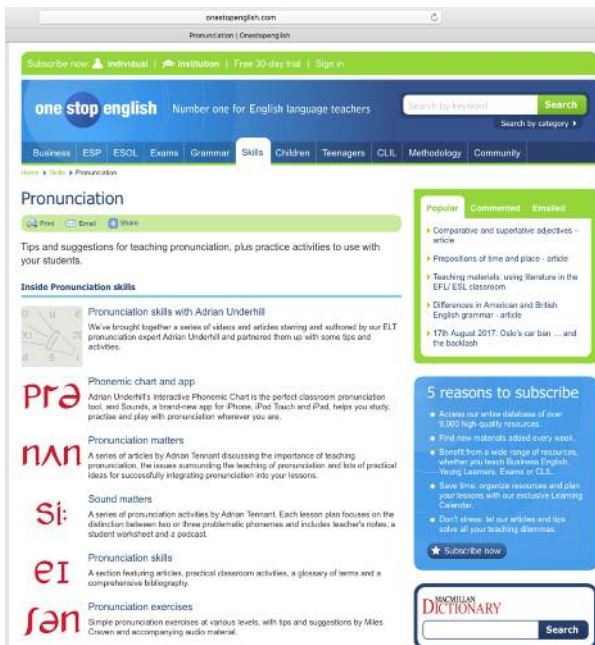
Weaknesses: From a visual standpoint, *English Pronunciation Practice* is not very appealing. In fact, it is very plain with text in boxes. While it is being updated, it currently appears to be very simple and outdated. This is a weakness in that it does not appear as well developed as many other ESL websites. Another weakness for students who are learners of English but do not have a Japanese background is that the Japanese translations (included in various locations) may be confusing

and/or unnecessary. Lastly, the website does not have a lot of variety in presenting the information. Most of the practice involves simply listening and repeating, and it seems to go overboard in this category, including too much of the same thing.

Overall Conclusion: *English Pronunciation Practice* includes some valuable practice material for students looking to supplement their ESL skills. Nevertheless, its lack of visual appeal, simplistic and outdated instructional approach, and lack of variety make it less than optimal.

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One-Stop English, Pronunciation



Product Name: One-Stop English, Pronunciation

Reviewer: Sofia Carreño

Author and/or Sponsor: Macmillan Education

Software Type and Source: Website at <http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/pronunciation/>.

Cost: \$68 for a one-year membership; free 30-day trial option.

Instructional Type: Teacher resource with videos, articles, and instructional materials for various language-skill areas, including pronunciation.

Intended Users: This site is recommended for teachers of EFL, ESL, and ESOL who teach at any level, to learners of any age, and in British or American English.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: *One-Stop English* provides English language teachers with lesson plans, worksheets, flashcards, audio, and videos. The resources are organized by skill areas (e.g., pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary), but they can also be found based on learners' age, level, and language focus (e.g., English for business, or other purposes).

General Description: *One-Stop English* looks very professional, and it is user-friendly. Its home page has eleven main tabs that provide access to business *English*, *ESP*, *ESOL*, *exams*, *grammar*, *skills*, *teaching children*, *teaching teenagers*, *CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)*, *teaching methodology*, and *MacMillan's "One-Stop English" community*. It also provides information on the latest *Guardian Weekly* news, scholarships, and tips for teachers. It contains lesson plans, worksheets, flashcards, audio, and videos to aid the teachers. Under the *Skills* tab, there is a pronunciation section, which contains videos, articles, and activities by Adrian Underhill and Adrian Tennant, a glossary of terms, a bibliography, a phonemic chart and a *Sounds* app developed by Adrian Underhill, a series of pronunciation activities and lesson plans, and other pronunciation exercises.

Strengths: *One-Stop English* includes videos that explain very clearly the basics of the British phonemic chart, how to teach articulation, and other processes. The videos are very clear and provide all the necessary information for novice teachers who may not be acquainted with the International Phonetic Alphabet. Another positive is how this site provides a lot of exercises to take to class—a real advantage for teachers who are starting to teach pronunciation and need some guidance and modeling.

Weaknesses: Besides the site's naturally heavy (but limiting) focus on British English, the exercises and lessons seem to be focused on segmental features mainly, disregarding the important role that suprasegmentals play in learners' intelligibility. Out of twelve lessons only two are about word stress. However, a few articles about suprasegmentals (such as intonation, assimilation, and elision) can be found in one of the subsections under the *Pronunciation* tab. Another limitation is that the exer-

cises I was able to access consisted mainly of simply repeating words after a model. If teachers were to use that type of activity only, students would not get any contextualized, communicative pronunciation practice. There was, however, a long list of exercises that I could not access without purchasing a membership, and some of them could provide more contextualized and meaningful practice.

Overall Conclusion: Without full access to all the exercises, it was difficult to gauge the value of the pronunciation instruction and practice provided by *One-Stop English*. Nevertheless, it seems to provide a great deal of helpful guidance and many useful ideas for teachers, who should then be able to make decisions with respect to how to utilize the materials provided in this site in their classrooms.

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Perception of Spoken English (POSE) Test



Perception of Spoken English (POSE) Test

Sign In

Improve your pronunciation
Find your specific problems and focus your pronunciation practice for faster progress.

Get Started

Students

Find the most common problems in your class
Track students' progress and see compiled results.

Get Started

Teachers

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Product Name: *Perception of Spoken English (POSE) Test*

Reviewer: Yuting Ruby Li

Author and/or Sponsor: Justin R. Shewell

Software Type and Source: Website at <https://posetest.com/>.

Cost: Free for students; free 30-day trial for teachers, after which payment is required. The basic “classroom” cost for teachers is \$1 per student seat. If a teacher buys more than 20 seats at a time, there is a slight discount, up to 50 seats, which costs \$40. Seats are valid for 1 year from the date of purchase and can be used with multiple students, but only one student at a time.

Instructional Type: This diagnostic tool is designed to help non-native English speakers diagnose their individual problems in speech perception. In addition, it can provide this information to teachers who can use it to design appropriate pronunciation instruction focusing on their students’ most common pronunciation problems.

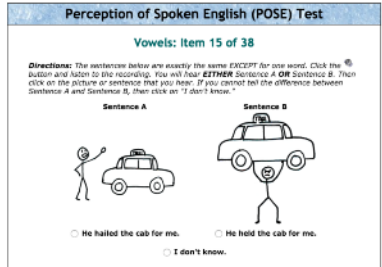
Intended Users: Students at ACTFL OPI levels from novice-low to advanced-high will find this site helpful. The diagnostics are clear and easy to navigate, but are also fairly text-dense. Therefore, novice-level students might need teacher guidance in taking the test and/or interpreting the results.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: On the *POSE Test*’s home page under “How is the Perception of Spoken English (POSE) Test different?” an explanation states that the POSE Test focuses on the perception of both segmentals and suprasegmentals. The problematic areas that this instrument can diagnose include vowels, consonants, word stress, sentence-final intonation, and sentence stress. By focusing on speech perception and having students distinguish between minimal pairs framed in sentences, the *POSE Test* measures the students’ listening discrimination and, by extension, indicates where they may have pronunciation production problems that can be improved.

General Description: The *POSE Test* website consists of three major parts: (1) introduction, (2) the diagnostic test, and (3) interpretation of results. The feature of greatest interest on this site is the diagnostic test that evaluates learners’ accuracy in perceiving both segmentals and suprasegmentals in English.

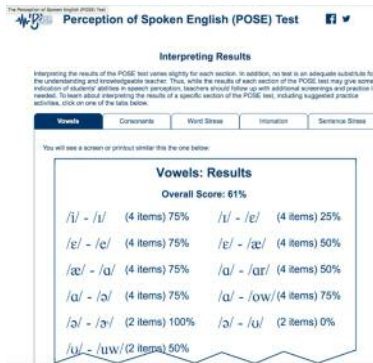
Strengths: This website is easy to use and navigate because it provides clear instructions with examples of how to take the test and a clear introduction to the website. The minimal pairs are presented in meaningful, sentence contexts. Moreover, each sentence in the test has a corresponding visual image, making it easier for learners to understand the meaning of the sentence rather than dwell on the possibly unfamiliar word.

Weaknesses: Admittedly, it is difficult to make up two sentences that make sense when the only difference between them is a single phoneme. Naturally, naturalness is sometimes compromised when creating such minimal-pair sentences. Because of this, the meaning of the sentence or the pictures provided frequently signals the more likely answer based on how realistic it is. Of course, sometimes the unrealistic, unlikely answer is the correct one. To fix this distracting problem, some sentences need revising. For instance, in the figure on the right, the sentences (and drawings) could be modified to read, *Superman hailed the cab for me*, and *Superman held the cab for me*.



After taking each section of the test, students see the results based on their choices of the correct meanings of minimal pairs they heard. Unfortunately, there is no way for them to go back to the questions and see the particular words they

missed, because they are not shown. Because the order of the questions is randomized in each administration of the test, even if students retake it, they will not get the same items in the same order again. Lastly, in the second “Sentence Stress” test, students merely mark the word/syllable which they hear as having the strongest stress. No understanding of word or sentence meaning is required. This test could be improved by



having students match what they hear with its meaning. Students would then have to understand what each sentence means rather than merely choose between emphasized words.

Overall Conclusion: The *POSE Test* is a useful and unique tool for identifying problematic areas in both segmentals and suprasegmentals and raising students’ awareness of their own speech perception. However, this diagnostic test could be improved by polishing some of the sentences and perfecting the design.

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Pronuncian: American English Pronunciation

pronuncian
AMERICAN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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American English Pronunciation

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Minimal Pairs Podcasts Products

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- Structured online English classes

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Product Name: *Pronuncian: American English Pronunciation*

Reviewer: Ksenia Zhao

Author and/or Sponsor: Mandy Egle, Seattle Learning Academy, founder and leader

Software type and Source: Website at <https://pronuncian.com>.

Cost: *Pronuncian* has both free and paid membership options. (This review focuses on the free version of the website and does not describe features available in the membership or subscription options.) Pronuncian.com offers two options for members: subscription, which renews automatically (monthly—\$25, three months—\$54, six months—\$90), as well as actual membership which expires at the end of fixed three (\$60) or six-month (\$100) period.

Instructional Type: *Pronuncian* offers resources related to pronunciation improvement for both students and teachers. Student resources include lessons with theoretical information, videos, and audio files, as well as exercises, drills and quizzes. Members have unlimited, ad-free access to all the lessons, videos, struc-

tured online English classes, the TrueVoice® recording and feedback system, personalized sound/stress/linking recommendations, as well as expanded tests and quizzes. Moreover, for a fee of \$110 users can get a remote assessment of their personal pronunciation issues via phone, Skype®, or voicemail. Teacher resources include a library of ready-made pronunciation-improvement lessons and materials to be used in English language classrooms.

Intended Users: *Pronuncian* is designed to serve three main audiences: English language learners (ELLs) of any proficiency level, English language teachers, and businesses with English communication challenges.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: *Pronuncian* units address segmentals (vowels and consonants), suprasegmentals (stress, linking, pitch, intonation), and perception (listening and minimal pair discrimination). The website also provides articulatory explanations with pictures and audio files, production and practice (quizzes), and awareness building activities.

General description: *Pronuncian* is an online resource targeted at American English pronunciation. The free version of the resource offers a wide range of material including theoretical explanations, lessons, podcasts, practice drills, and assessment quizzes. Memberships allow learners to receive personalized pronunciation recommendations, structured online lesson sequences, expanded tests, and lessons with no third-party advertisements.

The free version of the website allows limited access to the main five subsections:

- 1) The *Video* section provides access to at least 16 pronunciation instruction videos of good quality. The explanations on the videos are clear and consistent, as well as quite detailed and well-illustrated. The language level of some of the segmental-oriented videos is suitable even for beginners. The topics cover most of the English vowels and some consonants. However, some videos for non-members contain only parts of the full videos available to members only.
- 2) The *Lessons* section, available for free, includes various lessons on vowels, consonants and stress. Each contains detailed explanations of how to produce a sound in different locations within words, complete with examples. Examples include pictures showing tongue movements and sound files. The language of some explanations may be too complex for ELLs, which makes the sound files, pictures and graphs particularly useful. Each lesson has quizzes

to allow learners to check their understanding. However, most quizzes are available only with a paid subscription.

- 3) The *Assessment* section refers learners to a personal, 45-minute pronunciation assessment conducted via Skype® (or in person for residents of Seattle) by Amanda Lillet. Learners read a special script and get immediate feedback from Amanda, as well as a personalized self-study report. This assessment costs \$200.
- 4) The *Minimal Pairs* section provides an extensive listing of vowel minimal pairs. Users can see, choose, and then listen to a list of words contrasting the two vowels involved.
- 5) The *Podcast* section contains video and audio podcasts on pronunciation. The video podcasts overlap with the video section described above. The audio podcast section allows access to 209 audio explanations of common pronunciation issues that pose difficulties for ELLs.

Strengths: Even without a paid membership, *Pronuncian* offers a wide range of pronunciation material. The topics available with no membership cover both segmental- and suprasegmental-related issues. The content is well-organized and well-structured. Each section has plentiful, clear examples. The language used in podcasts and audios is well-suited for ELLs. The website provides English language learners with opportunities to view structured material, listen to examples, practice on their own, and assess their progress with the help of the extensive tests.

Weaknesses: Membership is required to view the full content of some topics and the full range of videos and lessons. Some explanations of suprasegmental issues use complex academic language that may pose difficulties for learners below the advanced level. However, each subpage still has a well-organized chart and examples with audio files. The descriptions of some vowel sounds are not exactly accurate or consistent. For instance, one description makes a distinction between long and short (rather than tense and lax) vowels. Moreover, the /ai/ diphthong is referred to as ‘long *i*’, while the /i:/ sound is referred to as ‘long *e*’, which may be confusing for some learners. Also, some of the assigned sound names (e.g., ‘the other u’, or ‘the *ow* sound’) are not widely used and may appear strange.

Overall Conclusion: *Pronuncian* is a well-made, well-organized resource targeted on American English. It provides a wide range of material for those interested in improving their pronunciation. Even the free section of the site provides access to a variety of good quality pronunciation material. The diversity of material both

in content and type is, undoubtedly, a strength. Minor disadvantages like complicated language in some sections and certain phonetic inaccuracies can be compensated for by teacher's instructions and do not outweigh the benefits. Overall, *Pronuncian* is a great resource for pronunciation learning, both self-regulated and instructor-assisted. Combined with a teacher's instruction, it can benefit English language learners even more than if used alone.

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Pronunciation Doctor

Product Name: *Pronunciation Doctor*

Reviewer: Lynn Henrichsen

Author and/or Sponsor: Marsha Chan (Sunburst Media)

Software Type and Source: website, YouTube® channel. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/PronunciationDoctor>.

Cost: Free (no ads, but occasional references to Marsha's *Phrase by Phrase*, a pronunciation improvement program, and other commercial books, software, and instructional materials available from www.sunburstmedia.com).

Instructional Type: Teacher and student resource videos that demonstrate and explain various aspects of English pronunciation, speaking, listening, grammar, and vocabulary.

Intended Users: English language learners (adults and possibly teenagers) with pronunciation challenges but enough English listening proficiency to understand the videos, as well as teachers of ESL pronunciation, speaking, and listening.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: The videos provide demonstrations and explanations of many aspects of English pronunciation: segmentals, suprasegmentals, listening discrimination, sound-spelling correspondences, etc. Some videos also address vocabulary, grammar, and other elements of the English language. Several playlists focus on English language skills for parents and child care providers.

General Description: *Pronunciation Doctor* is a YouTube® channel with over two thousand videos curated into over 20 playlists (and with nearly 6,000 subscribers). The producer of, and main character in, the videos is Marsha Chan, an emeritus faculty member with over 30 years of experience teaching English skills to ESL learners at Mission College in Santa Clara, California (where she received university awards for excellence in teaching) and elsewhere. Over the past six years, Marsha has created and posted an impressive array of videos addressing a huge variety of the challenges faced by ESL learners in the areas of pronunciation, listening, speaking, and more. The topics of these videos run the gamut from the pronunciation of reduced and contracted forms like *gonna* and *hafta*, to irregular verbs, and college oral communication. According to the channel's home page, Marsha's title "Pronunciation Doctor" was "given to her by those who know her superior talent at teaching various aspects of language, most notably, pronunciation." This talent, as well as her experience and energy, is very evident in the videos.

Strengths: Besides the large number and variety of topics addressed in the videos available at *Pronunciation Doctor*, the fact that the videos are generally very entertaining (due to Marsha's lively personality and acting) adds life to what might otherwise be boring linguistic topics. The entertainment value adds motivation. Marsha's excellent teaching skills also make the explanations very clear and memorable.

Weaknesses: Due to their very nature, the videos offer only one-way instruction. They provide explanation and demonstration but no interaction. The fact that the *Pronunciation Doctor* YouTube channel offers videos on so many different and wide-ranging topics may make it hard for users to find what they are looking for. Also, some of the older videos are not as well made or entertaining as the more recent ones.

Overall Conclusion: *Pronunciation Doctor* is a “treasure trove” of ideas, activities, and information for instructors seeking to improve their ability to teach English pronunciation (and other language skills). It is also a resource not to be overlooked by ESL learners who wish to improve their intelligibility or reduce their foreign accent in English.

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Pronunciation for Teachers



Pronunciation for Teachers

"Pronunciation for Teachers" is meant to provide professional help and resources for those interested in teaching pronunciation in all educational contexts. We started this site to provide teachers and researchers a place to find out what others are doing in this quickly growing area of language study.

Product Name: *Pronunciation for Teachers*

Reviewer: Lynn Henrichsen

Author and/or Sponsor: John Levis and a “worldwide steering committee” of pronunciation experts

Software Type and Source: Website at <http://www.pronunciationforteachers.com/>.

Cost: Free; no advertising.

Instructional Type: Teacher (and researcher) resource.

Intended Users: Teachers (and researchers) of pronunciation.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: According to its home page, Pronunciation for Teachers is “meant to provide professional help and resources for those interested in teaching pronunciation in all educational contexts.” In addition, it serves as a place for teachers and researchers “to find out what others are doing in this quickly growing area of language study.”

General Description: The home page has links to six sub-sections of the website: *Research*, *Resources*, *Teaching*, *Conferences*, *People*, and *Key Concepts*. The *Research* section contains lists of references to articles (organized by date of publication or the topic they address), book chapters, reviews of books and software, conference presentations, PSLLT conference proceedings, and journals dealing with different aspects of L2 pronunciation. The *Resources* section refers users to “useful” websites, videos, and books for pronunciation teaching. The *Teaching* section is intended to provide visitors with exercises and other activities that teachers can use to help students improve their pronunciation. The *Conferences* section provides links to the websites of various pronunciation-related conferences, such as PSLLT (Pronunciation in Second Language Teaching and Learning), Accents, EPIP (English Pronunciation: Issues and Practices), Speech Rhythm, and Phonology and Interphonology of Contemporary English. After clicking on the *People* menu item, viewers see a display of photos of various pronunciation experts. Clicking on some photos takes viewers to brief biographical sketches. From there (in some cases), another link takes viewers to ResearchGate.net, where information (and links) related to that expert’s publications and presentations can be viewed. Finally, the *Key Concepts* section provides visitors with links to articles and talks on topics related to pronunciation teaching, such as accent.

Strengths: The topics covered are pertinent, and the information they provide will be useful to teachers needing an introduction to the field of pronunciation teaching, as well as to more experienced pronunciation teachers and researchers hoping to update or expand their knowledge. Overall, it is very convenient and helpful to have so many online resources related to pronunciation teaching together in one place. The fact that they have been screened by the steering committee en-

sures their high quality and usefulness. The provision of photos, as well as bios, of the various pronunciation experts featured in the *People* section, personalizes and humanizes them. In addition, the website’s visual design is clean and uncluttered, making it easy to use and navigate.

Weaknesses: This website is a work in progress that is currently in only its beginning stage. Many of the sections are empty or sparsely populated. For instance, the *Teaching* section contains only one link to one set of “Perception Exercises in Pronunciation Teaching,” and the only topic under *Key Concepts* (at the time this review was written) is *accent*. As members of the steering committee (and others) contribute additional information, the website will increase in value as an information resource.

Overall Conclusion: *Pronunciationforteachers.com* shows great promise. With the passage of time and the addition of more resources, it will become increasingly valuable to teachers (and researchers) looking for information on the teaching of L2 pronunciation.

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Pronunciation Matters

PRONUNCIATION MATTERS
 Communicative, Story-Based Activities
 for Mastering the Sounds of North American English
 Lynn E. Henrichsen
 Brent A. Green
 Atsuko Nishitani
 Carol Lynne Bogley

Diagnosis of Difficulties Teaching Materials Teaching Procedures

Pronunciation Matters is an instructional system for improving the pronunciation of intermediate and advanced learners of English as a second or foreign language. It provides meaningful, communicative, and motivating practice activities leading to the mastery of targeted sound contrasts in North American English.

Pronunciation Matters contains 186 focused, independent instructional units that help English language learners recognize and overcome their pronunciation difficulties in a wide variety of areas that experienced ESL/EFL teachers around the world have noted as problematic for learners of English. The units are organized in eight sections—vowels, consonants, consonant clusters, reduction and blending, word stress, sentence stress, intonation, and segmentation.

Product Name: *Pronunciation Matters: Communicative, Story-Based Activities for Mastering the Sounds of North American English*

Reviewer: Katie Devenport Blanco

Authors: Lynn E. Henrichsen, Brent A. Green, Atsuko Nishitani, and Carol Lynne Bagley

Software Type: website.

Source: <http://www.pronunciationmatters.com/>.

Cost: On the *Pronunciation Matters* website, users can purchase all 186 individual units (which include story text, accompanying audio, practice sentences, and peer-practice card masters) for \$25.00. Users may also purchase individual units for \$1.00 each. For each unit, a free preview PDF is available to give users an idea of what it is like. The printed *Pronunciation Matters* book (without the audio files, card masters, or teachers manual) is also available on Amazon.com for around \$20. Access to the online “Diagnosis of Difficulties” and “Teaching Procedures” sections is free.

Instructional Type: *Pronunciationmatters.com* has material for both students and teachers including diagnostic materials, instructional units, practice activities, and peer-tutoring practice cards. It also includes a section for teachers on suggested teaching procedures.

Intended Users: *Pronunciationmatters.com* is intended for learners at any proficiency level who want to improve their pronunciation, but it may be most suitable for learners at the intermediate and advanced levels who are capable of understanding and telling stories in English.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: *Pronunciation Matters* units focus on the perception and production of suprasegmentals (intonation, sentence and word stress, reduction and blending, and pausing) as well as segmentals (vowels, consonants, and consonant clusters).

General description: *Pronunciation Matters* instructional materials are divided into 186 units focusing on various aspects of pronunciation such as vowels, consonants, consonant clusters, word and sentence level stress, and intonation. It uses stories to give context for meaningful, authentic practice activities that focus on improving users’ pronunciation of North American English. Besides these teaching materials, the website also has a section with recommendations and materials for diagnosing English language learners’ pronunciation difficulties. In addition, a third section of the website provides phonological explanations, hints for helping learners distinguish and produce sounds using other sensory modalities

(tactile, visual, etc.) besides listening, and sample lesson plans (with video clips) that describe the instructional procedures to be used with each unit.

Strengths: *Pronunciationmatters.com* excels at providing meaningful, contextualized, interesting activities to help English learners focus on and grasp the various features of North American English pronunciation that may be difficult for them. Chalkboard-style pictures help learners of all levels to understand concepts and activities (and can also be used by teachers). The clear articulatory explanations also allow teachers at any experience level to explain problematic areas with ease and simplicity. In addition, the site takes teachers through all stages of the teaching process—diagnosis, explanation, practice, and performance.

Weaknesses: The website presentation is a little dated, and the content is little more than an electronic version of what appeared in the original print book (University of Michigan Press, 1999), but it is easy to access and navigate and instead of purchasing the entire book, users can buy only the units they need. Although payment is necessary to access the full set of teaching materials available at the site, brief previews of each lesson are free. Overall, *Pronunciation Matters* provides so many useful, quality materials that it is well worth the purchase price.

Overall Conclusion: In summary, *Pronunciationmatters.com* is a valuable resource for both teachers and students. The wide variety of pronunciation features it addresses, the stories that provide context and emphasize meaning, and its ease of use make this website an asset in any pronunciation-teaching setting.

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Pronunciator



Product Name: *Pronunciator*

Reviewer: Jeff Peterson

Author and/or Sponsor: Pronunciator, LLC

Software Type and Source: Website and mobile app (iOS, Android, Kindle Fire), available at <http://www.pronunciator.com>, the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, and Amazon.

Cost: Free for all features, one user per login email address.

Instructional Type: Teacher and student resource including tutorials, drills, games, flashcards, course designer tools, dictionary lookup, grammar textbooks, assessment tools, and many others.

Intended Users: Language learners at all levels, from K-12 through higher education

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: For the most part, instruction focuses on suprasegmentals, the pronunciation of words and phrases as a whole, and listening.

General Description: *Pronunciator* provides users with many different learning options for learners with different learning styles. Learners can use the program

(i.e., read the instructions) in up to 50 different languages to study 80 languages including American and British English. It provides audio clips of words and phrases that users can listen to as they attempt to mimic native speakers. The program also provides users who wish to strengthen their accuracy skills the option of listening to audio clips either at normal speed or at a slower speed (for those who have difficulty processing input at native-speaker speeds). The program is organized into language courses with a main course and a *Learning Guides and More* section. These sections provide the audio clips of words and phrases related to the course and the level of the learner. These audio clips give learners the opportunity to practice using tracking or shadowing (listening and then imitating and repeating along with or immediately after the speaker) (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Griner, 2010, p. 342; Foote & McDonough, 2017; Henrichsen, 2015; Rosse, 1999). Much of the content is not contextualized in any sentence or story format, which takes away from its meaningfulness. Furthermore, the slow version of the audio clip provides a digitally slowed down version that diminishes the authenticity of the pronunciation as well as the user experience. I would recommend using the normal speed functionality alone. Unfortunately, little feedback is provided to users other than what words they get correct when working through the flashcards and assessments provided.

Strengths: *Pronunciator* has many strengths, including narration of the activity to be done, a good mix of topics and levels for all learners, ease in getting set up and started, flexibility to learn at any level and autonomously, high quality visuals and design, great course organization, and instruction in multiple orthographies for languages that use characters, as well as American and British English options

Weaknesses: My examination of *Pronunciator* also revealed some of its weaknesses. For instance, some pictures don't reflect the word or phrase being studied (e.g., random pictures accompanied the phrase *Where is the toilet?*), poor audio quality in the "slow" version of words and phrases, lack of interaction or feedback regarding learners' pronunciation of practice words and phrases, decontextualization of words and phrases, the fact that normal speed may be slightly slower than normal to some, and heavy reliance on users' self-checking.

Overall Conclusion: Overall, this software may be a great companion to learners' language studies, both on their own as well as in a language course. If users play the audio clips at normal speed and are able to self-check their pronunciation,

this program provides many words and phrases for pronunciation practice and vocabulary building. As an instructor tool, *Pronunciator* will most likely be best used as a pronunciation practice supplement to a class. However, instructors and learners should be aware of the weaknesses described above as they use *Pronunciator*.

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Rachel's English

J RACHEL'S ENGLISH

American English Pronunciation

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Intonation, Linking, Rhythm, and Stress: [Go to a Book](#)

Product Name: *Rachel's English, American English Pronunciation Guide and other sections devoted to pronunciation*

Reviewers: Steven Carter and Laura Decker

Author and/or Sponsor: Rachel's English

Software Type and Source: Website at <http://www.rachelsenglish.com/> generally, or more particularly at <http://rachelsenglish.com/improve-sound-like-native-speaker/>, <http://rachelsenglish.com/video-categories/>, and <https://www.rachelsenglishacademy.com/>.

Cost: Most of the videos and instructional features at this site are free. The site also advertises Rachel's English Academy at a price of \$14 per month. The Academy is described as "a collection of online video and audio courses for inter-

mediate to advanced speakers of English as a foreign language to dramatically improve English conversation skills.”

Instructional Type: *Rachel's English* is largely a student resource, but it can also serve as a valuable pronunciation resource for tutors working with English learners.

Intended Users: This site seems designed for English language learners who have achieved at least high-intermediate proficiency. In order to navigate the site and understand the resources available (along with the explanations offered in the instructional videos) users would need basic proficiency in English.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: The pronunciation-related sites at *Rachel's English* offer instruction on a variety of pronunciation features: segmentals (vowels and consonants), suprasegmentals (stress, rhythm, intonation, and pausing), perception, awareness building, production, articulatory explanations, and sound-spelling correspondences. It also walks users through practice exercises.

General description: *Rachel's English* is a YouTube® channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvn_XCl_mgQmt3sD753zdJA) with over 1,000,000 subscribers. Rachel, the creator, has produced a variety of videos focusing on American English, which can be accessed by clicking on the *Videos* tab on the home page. The videos are detailed and provide lots of breakdown, which is helpful for English language learners. Instruction addresses many of the individual segmental sounds in English and explains the production of specific vowel and consonant sounds in detail. Perhaps more important, *Rachel's English* also has materials that deal with *suprasegmental* aspects of pronunciation (blending/linking, intonation, rhythm, stress). This is particularly noteworthy because despite the importance of suprasegmentals, it is often difficult to find instructional materials that explicitly teach students how to improve their production of these features.

The variety of language used on the site is largely American English. The majority of the videos feature Rachel herself, but she often has guest speakers join her, and some videos feature other speakers by themselves. The language is fairly authentic, but the speakers often speak carefully, as though they were addressing an English-learner audience, raising the volume of their voices and increasing the pausing and stress levels in their speech. There are also options to slow down the audio, and in the subscription materials the website also mentions the possibility of more advanced classes with faster pronunciation.

Strengths: The site's most valuable feature is the level of detail with which it dissects different aspects of pronunciation. Explanations are thorough and involved; frequent pausing and repetition are used to raise the user's level of awareness. One particularly good example of this is found in a video called "English Conversation Exercise—Is Rachel Stressed? Ben Franklin Exercise." It teaches students how to dissect what they are hearing in such a way as to focus on suprasegmental aspects of the text. It goes through a sample conversation very slowly, highlighting instances of re-syllabification, linking, reduction, stress placement, intonation, etc. The video essentially demonstrates a strategy that cultivates awareness, boosts perceptive skills, and could help students practice monitoring their own speech.

Rachel's English is generally user-friendly, and it is fairly easy to navigate the site. Topics under the *Videos* tab are clearly listed and things are well organized visually. The interface is clean and uncluttered. The instruction is presented in a buffet-like fashion. This could be viewed as a strength because it gives learners a fair amount of autonomy and favors a self-directed learning approach. However, no support is provided to guide users from more basic lessons to more complex ones, which could be viewed as a weakness.

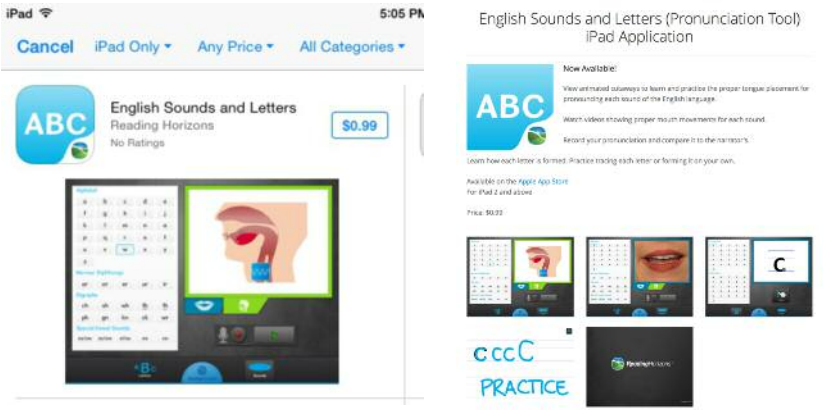
Weaknesses: Students could possibly use this website to learn English pronunciation independently, but its usefulness is limited because the videos provide only didactic explanation, with no practice activities for students. Also, the length of the videos ranges from 5 to 16 minutes. That is a lot of material for a language learner to internalize. The videos might be better used in short segments in a classroom setting, with a teacher providing additional explanation and practice. Further, a lot of jargon is used in the videos, and for inexperienced English learners this could be frustrating because they may not understand all of the terminology they hear. Also, the interface of the site was recently changed, making it somewhat difficult to go back and locate previously viewed videos. Some aspects of the organization seem fairly clear and forthright while others are vague and seemingly arbitrary. Re-locating specific videos, especially those that focus on suprasegmentals, can be challenging. They are not arranged in alphabetical order, nor do they follow an overly transparent ordering system. Fortunately, a search function exists to assist users in locating previously viewed videos.

Overall Conclusion: *Rachel's English* has a great deal to offer and gives a very thorough treatment of many different aspects of pronunciation. It provides

very specific, helpful pronunciation instruction and practice for those who have achieved at least a low-intermediate level of proficiency. Additionally, some of the videos and exercises teach users how to use different materials to help themselves learn. Despite some organizational flaws, the site is an excellent resource with a wealth of information overall. While students with high intrinsic motivation and a good ear can benefit from viewing the videos individually, these resources might be of greater benefit when used occasionally and as a supplement to regular instruction in a teacher-led classroom.

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Reading Horizons, English Sounds and Letters



Product Name: *Reading Horizons, English Sounds and Letters*

Reviewer: Ana-Lisa Mullen

Author and/or Sponsor: Reading Horizons

Software Type and Source: Mobile app for iOS (iPad only). Available at <https://www.readinghorizons.com/reading-intervention-program/mobile-applications/pronunciation-tool>. Electronic and paper-based instructional materials, independent study materials, and software. Available from <http://www.readinghorizons.com/esl-reading-instruction/product-overview>.

Cost: The iPad *English Sounds and Letters* app can be downloaded from Apple's App Store for \$0.99. For the full *Reading Horizons* package, a free 14-

day software trial is available online. An “at-home-use” 30-day trial costs \$10; then \$189 for a full-year subscription. For school use, the price of each product varies according to how many students it is intended for. There is also an additional cost for language packs for ESL students (\$35). A yearly subscription to the software package starts at \$199. The instructor-guided materials cost \$379, and the blended instruction package starts at \$525.

Instructional Type: Teacher resources, student resources, and assessment tools

Intended Users: *Reading Horizons* has several different programs designed to help those who struggle with reading (decoding) and related pronunciation challenges in English, including children K-12, adults, and ESL learners. Special ESL language packs are available for speakers of Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Haitian Creole, and Thai.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: *English Sounds and Letters* is designed to supplement and support the main *Reading Horizons* package. As the word *reading* in the title indicates, the primary purpose of the *Reading Horizons* program is to teach decoding skills. Using a systematic phonics approach, *Reading Horizons* materials cover all the basic sounds and syllables of English. They teach much more than just how to pronounce each consonant and vowel, however; sound-symbol correspondences are also emphasized. For example, units teach the difference between “long” and “short” vowels using a marking system. Diphthongs with either two vowels or a vowel and *r* are also covered in depth. Digraphs such as *ch* or *th* are taught, as well as those with silent letters, such as *kn* or *ck*, using a visual marking system to indicate the silent letter. Blends with *l*, *r*, or *s* (like *bl*, *dr*, or *sm*) are also taught, as are three-letter blends (like *str*) and digraph blends (like *thr*). Through instruction and exercises, users learn many patterns of relationships between the sounds and symbols of English that can otherwise be confusing.

General Description: *English Sounds and Letters* allows users to view animated vocal-tract cutaways and see the placement of the tongue and other articulators for every English language sound. In addition, videos show the proper mouth movements for each sound. The app also allows users to record their own pronunciation and compare it to a model. Finally, the app shows users the way to write each letter and allows them to practice forming it on their own by tracing it. Using the complete *Reading Horizons* package, students learn to recognize, mark and pro-

nounce different letter/sound combinations gradually as they work through a series of small units. Immediately after learning certain syllables and sounds in a unit, learners are also taught rules that govern which phonological environment these sounds occur in. For example, one unit teaches that when a one-syllable word ends in a consonant, the vowel will be “short”—as in *pit*, *kick*, *sat*, *pet*, and *loss*. Following the rule, learners are given a list of high-frequency vocabulary words that illustrate the sound patterns and rules they have just learned. Thus, not only do learners learn a wide range of commonly-used words, they use these words as exemplars of pronunciation patterns that they can use to decode unknown words with similar structures. Following the rule instruction section, multiple activities and worksheets help learners practice marking (and pronouncing) words according to the rules.

Strengths: The *English Sounds and Letters* app provides basic articulatory information in a helpful way at a low cost. The systematic way in which *Reading Horizons* materials teach the spelling and phonological rules of English in the context of important vocabulary seems to be very effective for English language learners. Because step-by-step guidance is provided, even teachers who have never used this instructional approach before can learn to teach it with minimal effort and preparation. Most important, by learning the rules of English spelling and pronunciation that *Reading Horizons* teaches, learners no longer have to rely on memorization or native speakers in order to read aloud and correctly pronounce unfamiliar English words.

Weaknesses: While the cost of *English Sounds and Letters* is low, *Reading Horizons* is expensive. Unless users are part of a school program that has purchased a site license, they may not be able to afford it. Also, by design, *Reading Horizons* focuses on a very narrow range of reading (decoding) and pronunciation (segmentals) difficulties. While it helps learners master the daunting system of sound-spelling correspondences in English, it leaves other aspects of pronunciation—such as suprasegmentals, pausing, and fluency—to other programs. Finally, for technical reasons, as with many other CAPT programs, the *English Sounds and Letters* app records users’ pronunciation, but they are left on their own to compare their own pronunciation with the model and determine what they need to do to improve. To help overcome this drawback, in the *English Language Enhancement* section, students are taught self-monitoring strategies.

Overall Conclusion: *English Sounds and Letters* is a helpful addition to the overall *Reading Horizons* package, which is one of only a few online programs that teach English language learners the correspondences between spelling and sounds in English. The materials and program are expensive, so they may not be practical for individuals or small programs, but for larger programs with a healthy budget *Reading Horizons* can be an extremely effective tool. Furthermore, *Reading Horizons* provides a two-year, money-back guarantee. This policy reflects the overall caliber of the instructional approach and products. Properly applied, *Reading Horizons* should produce good results in the areas it targets.

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Ship or Sheep

| shiporsheep.com | | <small>English language pronunciation practice with minimal pairs - simply measure over to hear</small> | |
|------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|
| Page | Minimal pairs | Simplified IPA* symbols | How to use ship or sheep |
| 1 | sheep/ship | ɛ / ɪ | |
| 2 | tin/hen | ɪ / e | |
| 3 | bet/bat | æ / e | |
| 4 | bet/bait | æ / eɪ | |
| 5 | bat/bad | æ / ʌ | |
| 6 | cat/cut | æ / ʌ | |
| 7 | cat/cart | æ / ɜː | |
| 8 | car/cut | æ / ʌ | |
| 9 | cut/cut | ʌ / eɪ | |
| 10 | lock/loop | ʌ / eɪ | |
| 11 | cut/caught | æ / ɔː | |
| 12 | caught/coat | ɔː / oʊ | |
| 13 | caught/coat | ɔː / oʊ | |
| 14 | caught/court | ɔː / ɜː | |
| 15 | coat/coat | oʊ / oʊ | |
| 16 | coat/coot | oʊ / uː | |
| 17 | darling/dialling | ɪ / eɪ | |
| 18 | air/A* | ɪ / eɪ | |
| 19 | tail/til | ɪ / eɪ | |
| 20 | tail/tell | ɪ / e | |
| 21 | tail/tile | ɪ / eɪ | |
| 22 | tile/til | ɪ / eɪ | |
| 23 | hour/are | ɑː / eɪ | |
| 24 | rot/lot | ɒ / ɒ | |
| 25 | pull/bull | p / b | |
| 26 | heart/art | h / - | |
| 27 | worse/verse | w / v | |
| 28 | worse/wooth | w / θ | |
| 29 | are/in/ash | ɪ / e / ʃ | |
| 30 | More voiced and voiceless pairs from Fonetiks | | |

Product Name: *Ship or Sheep*

Reviewer: Rachel Messenger

Author and/or Sponsor: Tim Bowyer

Software Type and Source: Website at <http://www.shiporsheep.com>.

Cost: *Ship or Sheep* is free of cost for users. The advertisements that pay for the site aren't obnoxious and are neatly placed on the edges of the page.

Instructional Type: *Ship or Sheep* is mainly a student resource. It provides practice for the perception of single-word minimal pairs.

Intended Users: Users of *Ship or Sheep* can be of almost any age and at any English-proficiency level. The interface is very simple and can easily be used by beginners. However, learners with prior knowledge of the vocabulary used in the minimal pairs will benefit more.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: The purpose of this website is to provide practice for the perception of English sound segments in minimal pairs. Students may also record themselves and compare their pronunciation with the original recordings. The instructional goal is for learners to be able to differentiate between the two members of the minimal pair.

General Description: The main feature that sets this website apart is that it allows learners to hear each of the words in the minimal pairs as the cursor hovers over the words. The website is organized into pages of minimal pair practice linked to the table of pairs that appears on the home page. The IPA symbols for the contrasted sounds are also listed on the main chart and each corresponding page. Each minimal pair set has its own page with a list of multiple example sets to practice with. For each differentiated set, pictures (instead of definitions) accompany the words represented. In addition, a practice "tongue twister" (or loaded sentence) related to the minimal pairs appears on each page. The voices of the recordings switch back and forth between a male and female for each set of pairs. British English is used and there are also some uniquely British words, such as *pram*, used in the minimal pairs. For this reason, users should be aware of differences between British and American pronunciation. For example, *hour* is pronounced like /aʊə/ in British English, while it is pronounced with a final r sound, /aʊər/, in most varieties of American English.

Strengths: *Ship or Sheep* is very easy to navigate and use for learners of all ages and levels. It provides many opportunities for learners to practice their perception of minimal pairs. The easy accessibility of recordings is the main strength as learners don't have to click and wait to hear the different sounds. The technology

also doesn't allow the previous recordings to continue if a new word is hovered over; the new word starts and the old word abruptly stops (this is not true of some pronunciation sites in which multiple hovered sounds will simultaneously play in a jumble of noise). The large number of minimal pair sets is also a strength. Learners have plenty of words to practice with.

Weaknesses: *Ship or Sheep* is severely lacking in terms of providing users with authenticity or context. While it clearly demonstrates the importance of correct segmental pronunciation, the pictures used are the only help student receive to understand the meaning of unknown words. As a native speaker of American English, I wasn't sure about some of the British vocabulary, even with the help of pictures. For example, I didn't know what the words *pram* and *offal* meant, but I now know how they are pronounced and won't

confuse them with their minimal pairs. Nevertheless, I wouldn't be able to use them in a sentence. I think English language learners may feel the same about many of the vocabulary items used in *Ship or Sheep* that they haven't had previous experience with.

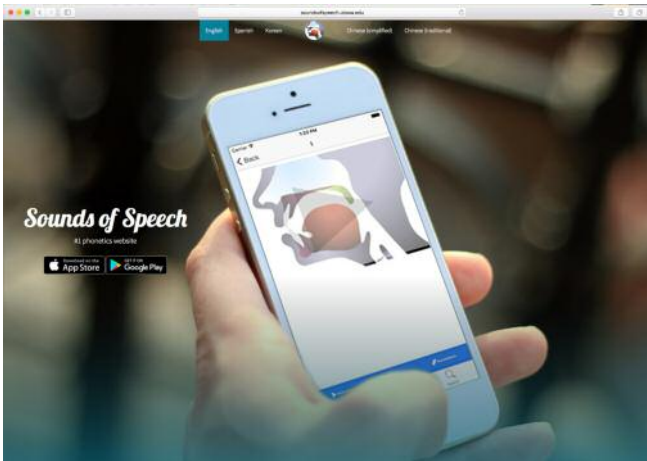
Overall Conclusion: This site is very simple. While focused only on minimal pairs, it is a great resource for learners to use for practice. While it does use British pronunciation, the large majority of sounds focused on in the minimal pairs are the same across all English accents. Since this site is free of cost and well organized, I would definitely recommend it to students looking for helpful resources to improve their pronunciation of vowel and consonant segments in English. If students are interested in acquiring a British accent, this site would be even more beneficial. If not, I would warn them about the British vocabulary and accent differences before sending them to it.

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Practice: "These six silly sisters are sweet to meet!"

Sounds of Speech



Sounds of Speech View More by This Developer
 By The University of Iowa Research Foundation
 Open iTunes to buy and download apps.



View in iTunes

This app is designed for both iPhone and iPad.

\$3.99

Category: Education
 Updated: Feb 12, 2014
 Version: 2.2.2
 Size: 79.8 MB
 Language: English
 Seller: University of Iowa Research Foundation © 2014
 Rated 4+

Compatibility: Requires iOS 8.0 or later. Compatible with iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch.

Customer Ratings

Current Version: ★★ 7 Ratings
 All Versions: ★★ 7 Ratings

Description

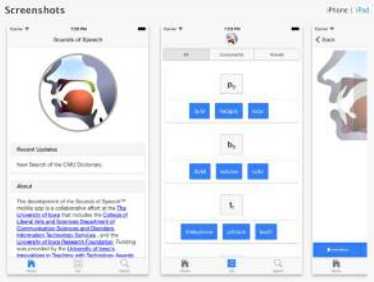
Note: This contains English, Czech, German, Spanish and Catalan not included.

This application was originally designed at the University of Iowa to help students learning how the sounds of [The University of Iowa Research Foundation Web Site](#) > [Sounds of Speech Support](#) > [More](#)

What's New in Version 2.2.2

New international interface now includes: Polish, Dictionary source.
 Text translations for: Spanish, Korean, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), English (swedish only)

Screenshots



Product Name: *Sounds of Speech*

Reviewer: Vadym Malyshkevych

Author and/or Sponsor: A collaborative effort of the Departments of Spanish and Portuguese, German, Communication Sciences and Disorders, and Information Technology Services at the University of Iowa.

Software Type and Source: The mobile app can be downloaded from <http://soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/index.html - english> or Apple’s App Store or Google’s Play Store. In addition, a fully functional online version of the program is available for free at <http://soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/index.html#english> (below the advertisements for the iOS and Android versions of the program on this page, click “English Module” and then click on a particular category of sounds; works only with some browsers and requires Adobe Flash Player plugin). There is also a short video trailer of the program on YouTube® at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16b2M-YwgKs>.

Cost: The mobile app (either iOS or Android) costs \$3.99. For desktop and laptop users, the website version is free.

Instructional Type: Teacher and student resource, a reference tool that shows and explains the articulations of English vowels and consonants.

Intended Users: *Sounds of Speech* is a resource intended for use by both teachers and students. Students need to be mature and motivated and possess a fairly high level of English and linguistic proficiency in order to understand the terminology; however, a new translation feature allows Chinese, Korean, and Spanish-speaking users to read explanations in their own native language.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: *Sounds of Speech* provides explanations (supported with visuals and audio) of the articulations of English segmental sounds (associated with IPA symbols) in isolation. It does not delve into suprasegmentals, nor does it provide practice activities other than providing a model that users may wish to imitate and repeat.

General Description: *Sounds of Speech* is an articulatory phonetics tool that can be used by both teachers/tutors to teach, and students to learn the sound system (segmentals) of English. Version 2.0 (February 2016) boasts a “totally new, improved, tablet-friendly interface,” plus a “dictionary search” feature and “translations for Chinese, Korean, and Spanish.” The website (now ten years old) is in the process of being updated.

Strengths: The sound inventory is logically broken down into categories and subcategories. Using this program can be a good way of learning the basics of the English sound system. The sounds are presented and classified according to the criteria and taxonomy used by English linguistics professors. The IPA notation is

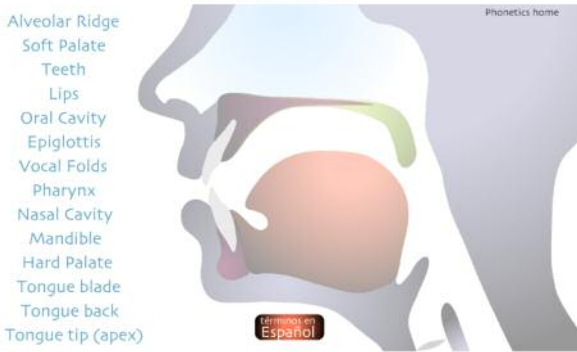
American English oriented. Such a professional, academic approach may create problems for ESL/EFL students who are not familiar with linguistic/phonetic terms like *glide*, *fricative*, *liquid*, etc. However, these problems are easily solved by on-line searches for these terms or the use of the Spanish, Chinese, or Korean options.

The structural design of the program is very clear. Vowels are divided into three “horizontal” groups according to their place of articulation—front, central and back. Vowels are not classified by their vertical location. There is also a brief explanation of what diphthongs are.



Consonants are arranged even more meticulously—according to (1) the manner of articulation, (2) place of articulation, and (3) voicing.

When users choose a sound, they get access to several interface elements— (1) *animation*, which shows how the parts of the articulatory apparatus (tongue, lips, vocal folds, uvula, etc.) move when producing the sound; (2) *annotate*, which explains the articulatory process in words; (3) audio *examples* of (American English) words containing the sound; and (4) *video* clips, which will be helpful for in-front-of-the-mirror pronunciation practice. The online version also contains the *anatomy* tab, which takes users to an interactive picture that shows all the upper elements of the human articulatory apparatus.



Weaknesses: Simply seeing the movement of the human articulatory apparatus will not, by itself, satisfy learners' need to practice these movements until they are accurate and natural. In other words, this program will not directly and quickly help English language learners adjust their articulatory apparatus' movements and thus sound more native-like. Nevertheless, it will be helpful for raising English learners' awareness of what they need to improve and work on.

Despite all its merits, the creators of *Sounds of Speech* omitted one thing, which, if added, would propel this program to a more professional level. It is the allophonic variations of English phonemes. It would be helpful if this program supplied that information and were capable of switching between the two modes – the basic (just as it is now) and the advanced. For example, in American English, the consonant “t” has several allophones—[t], [th], [tʰ], [ʔ], [ɟ], [ɬ]. It would really be useful to have these allophones presented and supplied with the explanation and examples of the environments in which the said allophones occur.

Overall Conclusion: All in all, the program is a very useful tool. I cannot commend the creators enough for saving me time and effort when, for example, I need to explain to Japanese ESL learners the difference between the American liquids /l/ and /r/. The animated representation provided by the program clarifies the difference in no time. The same could be said about teaching non-native students the nasalization of *-ing* endings in English. While there is still some room for upgrades and development, even in its present incarnation *Sounds of Speech*® is a solid professional instrument that can be called “a must” for ESL teachers' and students' toolbox.

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Train Your Accent

The image displays two screenshots of the 'Train Your Accent' website. The left screenshot shows the homepage with a navigation menu on the left, a 'Welcome to Train Your Accent!' message, and a table of lesson categories. The right screenshot shows the 'Listen and Practice' section, featuring an audio player and a transcript of a text about exercise.

Product Name: *Train Your Accent: ESL Accent Reduction Training and Conversational English Practice*

Reviewer: Chirstin Stephens

Author and/or Sponsor: Randall Davis

Software Type and Source: Website at <http://www.trainyouraccent.com/>.

Cost: Free (with advertisements).

Instructional Type: Like Randall Davis’s popular cyber-listening lab (www.esl-lab.com), this pronunciation-oriented website provides students with resources for individual practice and personal improvement. However, this site could certainly be adapted for use by teachers in the classroom, or assigned for out-of-class pronunciation practice.

Intended Users: Adult students from intermediate-high to advanced levels of proficiency will probably find this site very helpful if they are using it on their own. The “About This Site” page gives directions for how students can use it, but they will need to be fairly proficient readers to understand the directions.

Instructional Purpose/Objectives: Randall Davis states on the *About This Site* page that its purpose is to help students reduce their accents, understand relaxed speech, and learn how relaxed speech is used. It focuses heavily on the production of the reduced (schwa) vowel /ə/ in unstressed syllables or words.

General Description: *Train Your Accent* is made up of sixteen lessons centered on common topics and situations (restaurants, families, shopping, etc.). Each lesson includes an audio sample, two transcriptions, and discussion questions. The audio samples feature American English pronunciation and include common reductions. The first transcription of each audio sample is written with standard American English orthography, while the second transcription uses the IPA symbol for the schwa in red (ə) every time the schwa sound occurs in prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and articles. However, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that have vowel reductions to schwa are not noted. Discussion questions follow each passage with an extension activity.

Strengths: Davis recommends that users first read the written version of the audio sample to become familiar with the content, and then listen to the paragraph. After that, they should read the paragraph aloud, record themselves reading aloud, pay attention to the reductions, and compare their production to the audio sample. Later, they should create sentences using words from the paragraph, and then discuss their responses to the questions at the end with a partner, noticing whether or not their accent transfers to the new context. This recommended sequencing scaffolds students through the learning process by first allowing them to activate schema and familiarize themselves with vocabulary, and then moving on to listening discrimination before reaching production.

Additionally, the site provides multiple types of input to help students notice reductions. For instance, the second transcription in each lesson demystifies part of the English sound-spelling correspondence system visually for students by including the schwa in red so students can see, as well as hear, where they can produce reduced vowels.

Weaknesses: The biggest limitation to this website may be its name: *Train Your Accent*. That implies that the purpose of the site is much broader than it actually is. Davis clearly states that his purpose is only to only teach English language learners to use reductions and relaxed speech. Further, his use of *accent* ignores the professional literature (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 1997) that distinguishes among L2 accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility and encourages L2 teachers to help learners aim at developing intelligible, comprehensible, but not necessarily accent-free language.

A related limitation within the scope of reductions is that *Train Your Accent* focuses only on reductions in function words. It would also be helpful to note in the second (or a third) transcription the reduced sounds in the unstressed syllables of content words.

Overall Conclusion: This site offers valuable practice for intermediate to advanced students who want to sound more natural in connected speech by reducing function words. If the practice this site offers is deemed appropriate for a certain group of learners, it would be very convenient to use in a computer lab in conjunction with an audio recording program so students could compare their production to that of the model. Davis asks that the material be used in the original online format (rather than storing the audio files in another format). After students understand how to use the site, they could use it independently outside of class.

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Conclusion

Despite the common theme of pronunciation teaching/learning that these websites and apps all share, readers will note the great variety in their objectives, procedures, quality, costs, etc. That variety is a good thing because no single instructional tool is ever clearly superior for all learning purposes and learners. Rather, selecting the right website, app, or other tool is largely a matter of finding the right “fit” with a learner’s particular needs, goals, level, learning style, and situation (Byrd & Schuemann, 2014, p. 383).

Given the massive “forest” of websites dealing with different aspects of English pronunciation, we hope that this collection of reviews will help teachers and learners of English pronunciation find the right “tree” for their particular learners, purposes, teaching/learning circumstances or styles, and budget.

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Language Learning Strategy Shift, from an EFL to ESL Context

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Abstract

Previous studies and measures of strategy use generally have resulted in profiles that appear static. However, as language learning circumstances change, as is typical in study abroad contexts, it may be possible for learners to make adjustments in their use of language learning strategies (LLS). Hence, further studies are needed to expand exploration of the dynamic nature of LLS. This paper follows 120 Korean students who recently migrated to the Philippines and demonstrates how their use of strategies changed and improved after the shift from the an EFL to ESL context. These results emerged from questionnaires, survey responses (SILL), and interviews of selected participants. An additional important result from the study is how these EFL learners adopted new strategies, specifically the use of technology, in the new setting, further highlighting the fact that strategy use profiles of learners are not static.

Keywords: Language learning strategies, language acquisition, SILL

Introduction

Early studies on language learning strategies (LLS) date back to the 1970s when Rubin (1975) identified specific strategies employed by effective learners when learning a second language. Later, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified language learning strategies as cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective. Subsequently, Oxford (1990) provided a taxonomy of LLSs, classifying them as direct (those that involve the target language and mental processing), and indirect (those that support the language learning process). She also developed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which for years has been considered a universal instrument for studies of this kind.

Developments in studies on LLS have enabled scholars to explore the strategies employed by language learners in various contexts. For instance, there are those studies that have found association between the use and choice of learning strategies and different variables such as learning contexts, learner characteristics, learning experiences, language proficiency, and educational backgrounds (Deneme, 2008; Fuping, 2006; Khamkhien, 2010; Oxford, 2003).

For example, it has been found that a strong correlation exists among the learners' language proficiency, language learning achievement and use of LLS (Griffiths, 2003 as cited in Griffiths, 2008; Ya-Ling, 2008; Yang, 2007). Studies similar to the context of this study include Hong-Nam and Leavell (2007) who found in an American university setting that monolingual Koreans students reported that they use compensation strategies most and affective strategies least, while 420 bilingual Korean-Chinese university students use compensation strategies most and memory strategies least. With focus on good language learners, Gan, Humphreys, and Hamp-Lyons (2004) reported a comparative study of successful and unsuccessful learners of English in Chinese universities. The findings revealed that the unsuccessful students relied on rote-memorization, whereas the successful students relied on a systematic plan and supplemented rote-learning with strategies for reinforcing what they had learnt.

Halbach (2000) reached a similar conclusion after analyzing the use of language learning strategies of her subjects. She found that the weaker students demonstrated a lack of critical self-awareness; that is, they made little use of the monitoring and self-evaluation strategies. Some of the studies demonstrate that students with higher L2 proficiency use more strategies than those with lower proficiency do. For instance, Radwan (2011, p. 115) demonstrates that "more proficient students used more cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies than less proficient students. Likewise, Wharton (2000, p. 203) shows "more learning strategy use among learners with higher proficiency." Another study focusing on LLS in a study abroad context is that of Magno (2010) who found that compensation strategies employed by Philippine-based Koreans significantly predict proficiency.

In conclusion, the employment of language learning strategies facilitates and improves language learning and assists language learners in different combinations and in different ways, and may be more or less useful as variables change. In fact,

an earlier study which inspired the current paper stated that “there are proven and noted changes in the psycholinguistic abilities of Korean university students in the Philippines before and during the shift in the learning context, specifically during the shift from an EFL to ESL environment” (Cruz & Pariña, 2017, p. 83).

Nevertheless, relatively scarce is the longitudinal study targeting EFL learners’ LLS use at varying stages. Longitudinal studies are necessary to uncover specific information about the possibly fluid nature of LLS. For example, Chamot (1996) found that more proficient students use meaning-based strategies and less-proficient ones depend on word-based strategies. Grenfell and Harris (1999) meanwhile suggested that early LLS are more receptive and later ones more interactive. It was also discovered by Ridley (1997) that strategy use is based on individual differences as evident in her two-year study learners of German. Morita (2010) also discovered how the use of LLS can increase among learners in a study abroad context after a two-week language course.

With a brief review of the studies similar to the nature of the present one, it can be seen that more can be done to study the strategy use of language learners as they transition to a study abroad context in order to elucidate the possibility of change in the learners’ strategy preferences. Bearing this need in mind, the current study attempts to look into the changes in the learning strategies of Korean learners of English in Manila. This study may be important for several reasons: First, the diaspora of Korean learners of English to many English-speaking countries around the world—particularly the Philippines, continues to increase, and second, conducting such research can determine the dynamism of language strategy use, particularly by Korean study abroad students—a move that aims to help the Korean community in the Philippines in learning English. Specifically, this paper seeks to address the following questions:

1. How have the language learning strategies (LLS) of the Korean students changed after the shift from an EFL to ESL environment?
2. Is there a significant difference between the Koreans’ LLS in the EFL and ESL contexts?

Method

Subjects

Previous or current higher education students from South Korea who migrated to the Philippines were identified and contacted to participate in the data collection. As Grade 12 students (i.e., 16-19 years old) they may be considered mature enough to assess their L2 selves, evaluate their LLS, answer a basic grammar test, and express their opinions about English (its importance and role in their lives). Their seemingly long-term formal English language learning experience (since they were in grade three) seemed sufficient to foster the development of psycholinguistic variables and capacities, such as the use of various language learning strategies, that serve as the focus of the study. These learners are also assumed to have a better understanding of the changes that occur to them and their language learning goals as they have a first experience of the shift of learning context within the given time frame. Due to the nature of the study, South Koreans who finished high school, and who were about to study college in the Philippines were considered for the sample. The students come mostly from Seoul and nearby cities. Around 70-80% of them come from government high schools; however, diversity of the socio-educational backgrounds was also targeted. In addition, several Christian organizations are in-charge of a number of South Korean students who come to the Philippines. In this regard, the authors sought the help of a Korean pastor of a Christian organization in West Seoul's Banghwa district and a few students from East Seoul to gather possible participants for the study.

In the final count, there were 57 females and 63 males. Three Korean religious ministries in the Philippines endorsed sixty-five percent of the participants while the remaining were endorsed by previous students and other Korean acquaintances of the researcher. It must be noted that the said Korean religious congregations have offices in South Korea and the Philippines; hence, there was ease of access to the targeted participants. Participants belonged to a number of different fields of study (e.g. English education, AB English, Political Science, International Relations, Psychology, Engineering,). The sample was also diverse in relation to their initial scholastic performance, specifically in English, at least at the high school level.

Instruments

Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL)

Due to its comprehensive nature and great acceptance among L2 researchers, the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990) was utilized to identify the use of language learning strategies of the Koreans in Manila. The SILL contains 50 items, which are classified into six groups: Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective, and Social strategies. The SILL asks participants to rate themselves on a 5-point scale according to their experiences in use of language learning strategies. Scores reflect how well each statement is a reflection of themselves. For example, a score of 1 means that the statement "I make good use of my time in learning English" is almost or never a true of the learner. A score of 5 means that the statement is almost or always a true reflection of the learner.

Interview

Through the head pastors of the missionary organizations, thirty students were invited to participate in the interview part of the study interview to share their experiences of learning English in relation to the context of the study. In the end, eight subjects were interviewed after seeking their consent. The interviews were conducted after subjects had reached the 10 to 12-week period or their study abroad experience. The interview participants included both male and female students from the missionary congregations that belonged to different universities and academic disciplines.

Statistical procedures

For the statistical treatment of the data in the present study, dependent T-tests were used to determine if there were significant changes in the LLS of the Korean learners. The dependent t-test compares the means of two related groups (e.g., before and after treatment) to detect whether there are any statistically significant differences between these means. The means of the results of the sample's self-report on the SILL in the preactional (home environment) and actional (study abroad) phases were compared to determine the significance of the changes.

Results

The current study adopted Oxford's (1990) SILL to document the use of and changes in the Korean learners' LLS. We will discuss the direct strategies first and the indirect strategies, second.

Direct Language Learning Strategies

Memory strategies

During the EFL (Korea) stage, the results (first mean column) consistently indicate that the respondents moderately apply the use of memory-related strategies in learning English (3.24). The data reveals similar mean scores across all related strategies. Among the memory strategies the Koreans utilize, word association appears to be the least preferred, followed by reviews of lesson material.

The second column of means (study abroad context) reflects a greater use of memory-related strategies, such as word association, rhyming, and the use of images as the most popular among memory strategies in learning English.

Table 1: Memory Strategies of the Korean students before (EFL) and during study abroad (ESL)

| INDICATORS | | Mean | Interpretation | Mean | Int. |
|------------|---|------|------------------|------|-------|
| 1. | I associate new English words with what I already know. | 3.03 | Moderately Agree | 3.84 | Agree |
| 2. | I make drawing, either in my imagination or on paper, to help me remember a new word. | 3.20 | Moderately Agree | 3.68 | Agree |
| 3. | I associate new English words with what I already know. | 3.24 | Moderately Agree | 3.78 | Agree |
| 4. | I use rhymes to remember new English words. | 3.33 | Moderately Agree | 3.88 | Agree |
| 5. | I learn new words in sentences. | 3.32 | Moderately Agree | 3.75 | Agree |
| 6. | I put the new words into action. | 3.36 | Moderately Agree | 3.73 | Agree |
| 7. | I use flash cards or picture cards to memorize new words. | 3.28 | Moderately Agree | 3.85 | Agree |
| 8. | I review my lessons about English often. | 3.09 | Moderately Agree | 3.92 | Agree |
| 9. | I remember a new English word based on where I saw it. | 3.21 | Moderately Agree | 3.83 | Agree |

Due to situations particular to the students, strategy use was not wholly dependent on student choice or opinion. For example, Student 1, whose religious restrictions prevented social interactions, resulted in greater time being devoted to memory-intensive learning strategies:

I do not go out because my pastor do not like if I go out. So I just stay home and review my lessons. My tutor comes to the house every day and she reviews me with English grammar lessons.

For other Koreans such as student 2, the utilization of memory learning strategies is purposeful. In the particular response below, the learner's preferred learning strategy is the regular review of English lessons:

I think reviewing the lessons make me learn English. Once is not good so I need to read lessons again and again. Then if I learn new words, I try to remember situation. For example when I learned "how much is this", I remember it because I know that it was in a restaurant.

Cognitive strategies

Time management skills and the desire to improve comfort with content are the most cited cognitive strategies generally (Kiener & Weaver, 2011). Drawn from the data presented below, the cognitive strategies our learners chiefly prefer are the discovery of grammar rules in English, the examination of a reading text followed by a more careful coverage, and reading passages written in English. Thus, the responses signify that most of the learners consider using reading activities as a strategy in learning English. The least popular strategies include the employment of varied ways in which English is used, and the imitation of English-speaking people for the purpose of correct pronunciation.

In the study abroad phase, most of the respondents reflect a preference for reading English texts for pleasure, finding similarities in pronunciation from the native language, and attempting to comprehend the sense without direct translation. Overall, the learners used cognitive strategies to a greater extent during their study abroad experience.

Table 2: Cognitive Strategies of the Korean students before and during study abroad

| INDICATORS | | Mean | Interpretation | Mean | Int. |
|------------|--|------|------------------|------|-------|
| 1. | I often review newly learned vocabulary or expressions by repeated writing or speaking. | 3.21 | Moderately Agree | 3.83 | Agree |
| 2. | When I speak English, I try to imitate English-speaking people, in order to pronounce the words correctly. | 3.13 | Moderately Agree | 3.82 | Agree |
| 3. | I often practice English alphabet sounds. | 3.28 | Moderately Agree | 3.73 | Agree |
| 4. | I often watch TV shows or movies in English or I listen to English music. | 3.25 | Moderately Agree | 3.78 | Agree |
| 5. | I use English words I know in different ways | 3.32 | Moderately Agree | 3.75 | Agree |
| 6. | I start conversations with others in English | 3.23 | Moderately Agree | 3.78 | Agree |
| 7. | I read passages written in English. | 3.37 | Moderately Agree | 3.92 | Agree |
| 8. | I can imagine myself studying in a university where all my courses are taught in English. | 3.31 | Moderately Agree | 3.78 | Agree |
| 9. | I go over a reading text before reading it carefully. | 3.43 | Agree | 3.68 | Agree |
| 10. | I find similarities in pronunciation between Korean and English. | 3.25 | Moderately Agree | 3.91 | Agree |
| 11. | I try to discover grammar rules of the English language. | 3.50 | Agree | 3.78 | Agree |
| 12. | I look for the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I can easily understand. | 3.30 | Moderately Agree | 3.73 | Agree |
| 13. | I make an effort to understand the sense of what I read or what I hear without translating word for word. | 3.31 | Moderately Agree | 3.88 | Agree |
| 14. | I make summaries of what I hear or read. | 3.21 | Moderately Agree | 3.70 | Agree |

The responses from student 3 represent the proclivity of learners to read passages in English to learn the language. However, as clarified by the answer below, these passages are not confined to literature but in everyday objects such as commercial signage:

"I try to read those that has English language. My teacher said even in restaurant, or shopping mall, I need to understand them because they help me learn understand English."

Indeed, traditional and modern founts of knowledge of English grammatical knowledge such as literatures are also present as indicated by the same student:

"My books are written in English, except Filipino class. So I need to read them always."

Learners have also noted that while the direct effects of the consumption of English culture is of questionable value, they continue their exposure with it. Student 4 narrates this instance.

"Now I listen to English music. When I ride fx or eat in restaurant, most of songs are English. When I go to the gym, the songs are English. I am not sure if I learn English because of doing that thing, but I think it helps."

Compensation strategies

Overall, during the EFL stage, the learners' responses demonstrate that they moderately (3.3) use compensation strategies when engaged in the use of English. A prominent preference is concerned with their use of finding other means to express what they intend to say, particularly exemplified in the use of alternative expressions if the original intended meaning cannot be articulated. A secondary, but nonetheless salient compensation strategy are gestures and other non-verbal cues at the instance when English verbal expressions become challenging. Accordingly, literature has established that students who tended to use more switching to the mother tongue in their communication tended to use less mime or gesture (Karbalaeji & Taji, 2014). Also, the standard deviation's responses found in the table were somewhat consistent, with all responses having fairly high scores.

The second column of means indicates that, when compared to their former "EFL" selves, the respondents often adapt to compensation strategies when confronted with difficulty in actually learning English. Chief amongst these compensational strategies is one where learners make use of alternative English expressions. Such a strategy is closely followed by a preference to, firstly, create new words in the absence of knowledge on the appropriate English expression,

and secondly, the contextual compensation strategy of going through English texts without having to identify every new word.

Table 3: Compensation strategies of the Korean students before and during study abroad

| INDICATORS | | Mean | Interpretation | Mean | Int. |
|------------|---|------|------------------|------|-------|
| 1. | When I hear or read a new word in English, I try to guess the meaning by looking at the rest of the sentence. | 3.31 | Moderately Agree | 3.69 | Agree |
| 2. | When I have trouble making myself understood in English, I use gestures to express what I want to say. | 3.30 | Moderately Agree | 3.64 | Agree |
| 3. | I form new words if I do not know the right ones in English. | 3.41 | Agree | 3.78 | Agree |
| 4. | I read a text in English without looking up every new word. | 3.20 | Moderately Agree | 3.78 | Agree |
| 5. | I try to guess what another person will say in English. | 3.18 | Moderately Agree | 3.77 | Agree |
| 6. | When I can't find an expression in English, I try to find another way to find another way to say what I mean. | 3.22 | Moderately Agree | 3.81 | Agree |

As part of overall assessment of their direct strategies, some Koreans noted that reading books, while an extant practice among learners, was only done out of academic obligation. Despite the difficulties of learning English, learners expressed a continued desire to gain command of the language through contextually understanding English cultural products such as the response of one interviewee,

“I hear classmates talking about Game of Thrones and Walking Dead TV show. One time I sat with them and feel how it is to watch the show without Korean subtitles. It was hard, but I try again.”

Overall, with reference to the statements provided by the interviewees, it appears that the students felt that their immediate environment had a positive effect in their education in, and practice of, English.

Indirect Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) stipulates that indirect strategies are those that do not directly focus on the target language per se, but upon the management of the learning process. These strategies include, better planning, self-evaluation, self-discipline

and encouragement, as well as developing a greater understanding appreciation for target language users, and cross-cultural understanding in general. In short, these are strategies which language learning situations more likely and more productive

Metacognitive strategies

Prior to their study abroad, the Koreans moderately agreed that they make use of metacognitive strategies in learning English (Mean score of 3.2 out of 5). Metacognition is one's awareness of how he or she learns something, and in this regard, the learners appear to be conscious about their learning process

During the study abroad stage, the reported use of metacognitive strategies appeared to increase across all types. The greatest improvement seems to come in the area of time management.

Table 4: Metacognitive strategies of the Korean students after the EFL to ESL shift

| INDICATORS | | Mean | Interpretation | Mean | Int. |
|------------|---|------|------------------|------|-------|
| 1. | I find opportunities to use English. | 3.23 | Moderately Agree | 3.83 | Agree |
| 2. | I am aware of my mistakes when I use English. | 3.38 | Moderately Agree | 3.85 | Agree |
| 3. | When someone speaks to me in English, I listen attentively. | 3.17 | Moderately Agree | 3.98 | Agree |
| 4. | I do my best to become better in using English. | 3.38 | Moderately Agree | 3.68 | Agree |
| 5. | I use my time well to learn English. | 3.07 | Moderately Agree | 3.92 | Agree |
| 6. | I look for people who can speak to me in English. | 3.08 | Moderately Agree | 3.75 | Agree |
| 7. | I set goals in order to learn English. | 3.12 | Moderately Agree | 3.68 | Agree |
| 8. | I look for opportunities to read English text. | 3.06 | Moderately Agree | 3.73 | Agree |
| 9. | I am concerned about my progress in learning English. | 3.20 | Moderately Agree | 3.86 | Agree |

As an example from the category of self-evaluation, student 4 shared the following:

“If I talk, I know that there is something wrong with what I say. Sometimes I correct myself. Sometimes my friends correct me. Sometimes no one corrects me. But I know I am wrong.”

Affective Strategies

Overall, the subjects demonstrated moderate but significant improvement in their awareness, use, and control of their emotions in language learning situations, as seen in Table 5. This may be associated with or reflect increasing confidence and proficiency in the target language.

Table 5: Affective strategies of the Korean students after ESL to EFL shift

| INDICATORS | | Mean | Interpretation | Mean | Int. |
|------------|--|------|------------------|------|-------|
| 1. | When I am stressed by the idea of speaking English, I try to relax. | 3.34 | Moderately Agree | 3.72 | Agree |
| 2. | I will still encourage myself to speak English even if I am afraid to make mistakes. | 3.29 | Moderately Agree | 3.82 | Agree |
| 3. | When I succeed, I reward myself. | 3.34 | Moderately Agree | 3.82 | Agree |
| 4. | I am aware of my nervousness when I use English. | 3.20 | Moderately Agree | 3.79 | Agree |
| 5. | I use a diary to write down my feelings. | 3.09 | Moderately Agree | 3.74 | Agree |
| 6. | I talk to other people to share my feelings about my English learning experience. | 3.16 | Moderately Agree | 3.82 | Agree |

When asked about her affective strategies, one interviewee noted that she participates in recreational activities at the behest of friends but adds that her attendance in such events is contingent to her academic load:

“Every Friday and sometimes Saturday, my friends invite me to Malate. They tell me I do not need study all the time. So sometimes I go, but I do not [always] because I have many assignments to finish.”

Social Strategies

Wharton (2000) found that bilingual Asian students learning a third language (English) favored social strategies more than any other types (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2005). Results below show our Korean subjects using this strategy type slightly more (mean score = 3.4), and increasing use as a result of their study abroad experience.

Table 6: Social strategies of the Korean students after ESL to EFL shift

| INDICATORS | | Mean | Interpretation | Mean | Int. |
|------------|---|------|------------------|------|-------|
| 1. | If I don't understand what is said to me in English, I ask the person to help me by speaking slower, repeating, or clarifying what has been said. | 3.38 | Moderately Agree | 3.74 | Agree |
| 2. | I ask English speakers to inform me of my mistakes. | 3.31 | Moderately Agree | 3.83 | Agree |
| 3. | I practice English with other learners such as my classmates. | 3.37 | Moderately Agree | 3.91 | Agree |
| 4. | I ask for the assistance of English speakers regarding my English learning goals. | 3.49 | Agree | 3.84 | Agree |
| 5. | I ask questions in English. | 3.44 | Agree | 3.90 | Agree |
| 6. | I am interested in and willing to learn the culture of English speaking countries. | 3.46 | Agree | 3.69 | Agree |

The evident increase may be partially ascribed to increased opportunities in the ESL environment, increased confidence, and social or parental expectations. According to one interviewee:

“My father told me to spend more time with Filipinos so I can learn more. And because there are not so many Koreans in school and at home, I get to spend more time with Filipinos and they like it.”

In summary, both direct and indirect learning indicators have shown a significant improvement after the study abroad experience (See Tables 7 & 8 below).

Save for an already somewhat robust social learning strategy, our subjects have demonstrated sizable improvement in their English learning strategy use. The degree of improvement between the direct and indirect learning strategies was sim-

ilar, demonstrating that when aggregated, improvement in strategy use has largely run at a uniform pace.

Table 7: Summary of Language Learning Strategies of the Korean Students

| INDICATORS | Before (in Korea) | | After (in the Philippines) | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| | Mean/SD | Interpretation | Mean/SD | Interpretation |
| DIRECT: Memory | 3.23/1.17 | Moderately agree | 3.81/.83 | Agree |
| Cognitive | 3.29/1.21 | Moderately agree | 3.79/.84 | Agree |
| Compensation | 3.30/1.22 | Moderately agree | 3.76/.83 | Agree |
| Over-all | 3.27/1.20 | Moderately agree | 3.79/.84 | Agree |
| INDIRECT: Metacognitive | 3.19/1.20 | Moderately agree | 3.81/.74 | Agree |
| Affective | 3.24/1.21 | Moderately agree | 3.78/.73 | Agree |
| Social | 3.41/1.24 | Agree | 3.82/.76 | Agree |
| Over-all | 3.28/.121 | Moderately agree | 3.80/.74 | Agree |

As can be seen in Table 8, the increase in strategy use is highly significant, not only in general, but surprisingly, in each and every category.

Table 8: Language Strategy Use Before and After arrival in the Philippines

| Learning Strategies | Mean/SD | | Computed t-score | P-Value | Conclusion |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|---------|-------------|
| | Before | After | | | |
| DIRECT: Memory | 3.23/1.17 | 3.81/.83 | 8.75 | .000 | Significant |
| Cognitive | 3.29/1.21 | 3.79/.84 | 7.50 | .000 | Significant |
| Compensation | 3.30/1.22 | 3.76/.83 | 5.75 | .000 | Significant |
| Over-all | 3.27/1.20 | 3.79/1.20 | 8.90 | .000 | Significant |
| INDIRECT: Metacognitive | 3.19/1.20 | 3.81/.74 | 8.59 | .000 | Significant |
| Affective | 3.24/1.21 | 3.79/.73 | 7.08 | .000 | Significant |
| Social | 3.41/1.24 | 3.82/.76 | 4.95 | .000 | Significant |
| Over-all | 3.28/.121 | 3.80/.74 | 8.16 | .000 | Significant |

A Possible New Strategy Category

During the interview process, it became clear that the subjects, once in the Philippines, were becoming more aware of, and more involved in, the use of digital resources, both in and out of class. We believe this may constitute a new category of strategy. The use of digital resources cuts across both cognitive and social domains, and thus is not easily situated in Oxford's SILL inventory classification system.

The use of English by learners and their friends on language learning apps and sites, as well as social media sites greatly increases affordances, both in terms of resources and opportunities. Below are comments from two different interviewees:

"We have Facebook groups in most classes, and everything is in English or sometimes Tagalog. They [teachers] won't write it in Korean for me. I use it to learn English too. Also we chat with each other on Viber and other social networking sites. So, even if I am not with them [colleagues], I get to learn English."

“The teachers require us to form online groups. So I have no choice. But then I realize that it helps me use English, and I learn because of this online communication.”

Students also appear to use the internet in English during their spare time:

“During my free time or when I wait for my next class, I play some games using my phone. There are so many games that use English. Also when we play DOTA [Defense of the Ancients] or LOL [League of Legends], I play using English server.”

Conclusion

The study sought to document one aspect of the language learning sojourn of Koreans in the Philippines (strategy use). Through the study, it was shown that Oxford's (1990) SILL appears to be consistent in proving that it remains a robust instrument in exploring the language strategies of all sorts of learners.

The study also revealed that there was a significant increase in the use of LLSs with reference to their pre-study abroad stage. This is an important insight. Strategy use profiles should not be seen as static or trait-based. Previous research has already shown that strategy use changes with proficiency. Our study shows that the learning environment may also have a significant impact.

One emerging phenomenon in strategy use is the use of technology. The use of English by the learner's colleagues on social media sites and communication apps spurs opportunities for students. Even within academia, the utilization of online tools, specifically Internet groups, in English required the learners to use and learn the language. With constant societal changes, there can be emerging strategies in learning English which may argue for a periodic re-examination of the Strategic Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

And finally, this study was also able to reiterate the importance of study abroad opportunities and strongly suggests that language learners be encouraged to participate in such programs. Based on the statements of the Koreans, interacting in an ESL environment with Filipinos improved their language skills, their confidence, and their strategy use in general.

Recommendation

The present study proposes that virtual strategy use (See Figure 1 below) be included in the SILL inventory (Oxford, 1990).



Figure 1: Proposed features of Virtual Strategies

In the 21st century, the use of devices that afford the use of numerous applications and sites is inevitable and increasingly helpful. Consequently, learners are able to use new information and communication technologies such as smart phones as a strategy in learning English both directly (e.g., online dictionaries) and indirectly (e.g., gaming). The study abroad context has also paved way for the learners' frequent use of smart phones enabling them to engage in virtual activities. Additionally, it is increasingly common for teachers to use online platforms as means to engage learners. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Viber, and Twitter are used by students and teachers to update themselves about academic as well as personal matters. File sharing is also a common practice among teachers.

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Babbel: A Mobile Language Learning App

Review by Musa Nushi and Mohamad Hosein Eqbali

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Introduction

Technology is dramatically changing the way we go about teaching and learning a second language (L2) (Chapelle, 2007; Motteram & Sharma, 2009; Otto, 2017). Instructional technology benefits L2 learners in a number of ways: it provides learners with a variety of authentic and educational materials (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), allows for independent, self-paced learning (Pim, 2013), provides learners opportunities for developing intercultural competence via communication with native and other non-native speakers (Whyte, 2011), and makes them more motivated (Baleghizadeh, 2015), just to name a few. Technological innovations also enable language teachers to create a more exciting and interactive classroom environment by incorporating materials from outside world into the classroom (Stanley, 2013), furnish learners with multimodal feedback (Elola & Oskoz, 2016), and help those learners with special learning needs (Roblyer & Doring, 2013). It would not be far from the truth to state that nowadays there is technology to support every aspect of language learning and teaching.

With the increasing development in wireless and mobile technologies, using mobile devices to learn and teach L2 has been attracting a lot of researchers' attention (See Viberg & Grönlund, 2012 for a review). In fact, Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), a subset of M(mobile)-learning, is a fast growing field of research with promising implications for second language learning and teaching (Pachler, Bachmair & Cook, 2010). Handheld mobile devices such as smart phones, tablet computers, laptops, MP3 and MP4 players, etc. are appealing to users as they provide them with permanency, accessibility, immediacy, and interactivity among other features (Ogata & Yano, 2005). Thornton & Houser (2005, p. 226) add that "mobile devices can be effective tools for a broad range of educational activities." Moreover, new mobile software (e.g., Duolingo, Busuu, 50languages, HiNative, ...) are being developed that promise to facilitate language learning process. Evaluating the affordances that seven mobile English learning apps provide for adult learn-

ers, Chen (2106) concludes that the apps do in fact enhance learning but that “there is no single language-learning app that could provide a one-size-fits-all solution to meet adult learners’ language learning needs,” (p. 49).

The growing enthusiasm towards MALL and its applications should not be taken at face value. As Nushi and Jenabzadeh (2016, p. 30) have noted, many of the mobile language applications “have been developed by people outside of the field of second language pedagogy and their effectiveness cannot and should not be taken for granted.” Viberg and Grönlund (2012) also point out that “there is a lack of empirical studies providing concrete evidence on how the mobile technology use can enhance individual’s language learning results,” (p. 7). Given those cautionary notes, it behooves us to critically examine the available language learning applications so that language learners and teachers alike aware of their potential advantages and disadvantages and make informed decisions as to whether or not or how to include them in language learning and teaching package. The present paper reviews a language learning app named Babbel and explores its potential effectiveness for L2 language learning and teaching.

Application Details

Publisher: Babbel

Product Type: Smartphone Application Software

Language(s): Multilingual

Level: Any

Media Format: APK/IPA

Operating Systems: Android/iOS

Hardware Requirements: Smartphone/Internet Connection

Supplementary Software: None

Price: Free, offers built-in purchases

Description

After downloading the app for their Android or iOS devices, learners are provided a list from which they can choose their target language. The list of the languages one can learn with Babbel are: Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese (Brazilian), Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish. If you are an English speaker, all of these courses and their

materials are provided in English. However, if you want to learn English, you must choose a language from a list of six languages: French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish. Unless you speak one of these languages, the English course would be meaningless to you. It is important to note, early in the review, that all these courses from beginner to advanced are designed by the staff of Babel, whom they claim are ‘language experts’. Unlike Duolingo, which is a community-driven language app, Babel relies on its own language experts to provide courses. In this review we are taking the French course, one of its most popular ones, to get familiar with Babel’s course content and methodology.

After choosing the course, the learners are provided with a curser to proximately choose their language efficiency. There are only two options: Beginner and Advanced. For the sake of this review, we will put the curser on Beginner [Figure 1].



Figure 1.
We put the ‘World of language’
on Beginner.

Immediately, there is an exercise. Beginner learners must choose the translation of ‘Hello’ in French. There are two options to choose from at the bottom of the page: ‘Merci’ and ‘Bonjour’ [Figure 2].

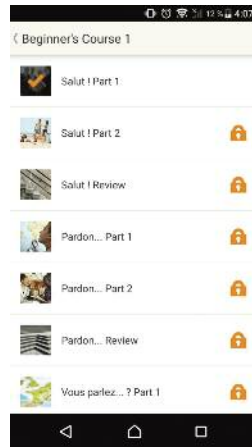


Figure 2.
‘Merci et Bonjour’.

The rest of this exercise concerns itself with asking/teaching more and more basic words and phrases in French, including phrases like ‘Ca va ? – How are you?’ and ‘Comment tu t’appelles? – What’s your name?’. After clicking on each French phrase, Babbel provides its complete pronunciation said by a native speaker. After finishing this exercise, we go in for the real French course and lessons.

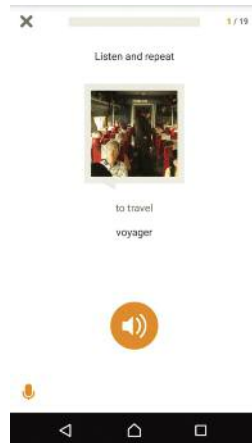
It is important to note and analyze how these language apps provide their material and give access to their users. For example, Duolingo gives full access of all its materials to the users and claims that its ads running in the app are keeping education free. Rosetta Stone gives 30 days of free access to all its materials, but users cannot download them to use offline. Babbel on the other hand provides users with many courses, several in the beginner level, several in the intermediate, several in the advanced level, and many more in other subjects; such as traveling, family and friends, etc. However, only one lesson of each course in the app is available for free for the users, meaning a beginner learner can only have six lessons – since there are six beginner courses – for free [Figure 3].

Figure 3.
Beginner's Course 1.



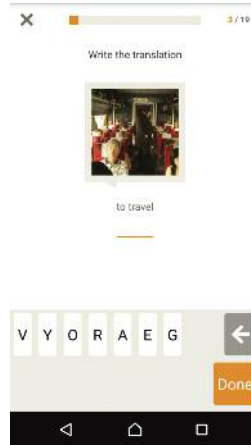
We start with Beginner's Course 4 which is about traveling. The first exercise is a 'listen and repeat' exercise [Figure 4]. The app enjoys a voice recognition system which asks the reader to repeat the phrase or words the course is trying to teach. Babel also gives direct translation of the target language.

Figure 4.
Inside a lesson.



After teaching three phrases or words in this manner, Babel now asks the user the same words and phrases; but this time it doesn't show the pictures, only the language. And then it questions the users about the spelling of each word and phrase [Figure 5]. It is worthwhile to mention that the app gives the learners obvious hints as shown in the picture.

Figure 5.
Inside a lesson.



After getting the spellings right, the app continues and teaches three new, and a bit more difficult, phrases and words in the same ‘listen and repeat’ manner, as shown in figure 4. And immediately again, it tests the users of their knowledge of the freshly taught material by choosing the correct translation. [Figure 6.] And then continues to ask about the spelling in the same previous manner.

Figure 6.
Inside a lesson.



After this exercise, the learners are presented a conversation about the same topic they have been learning in the same lesson [Figure 7]. It is a pleasant surprise for the users to be exposed to a real-life conversation and language, especially because until this exercise they have been only exposed to a robotic type

of teaching and testing. It's important to mention that this exercise is a dynamic one since the learners have to put in some certain words and phrases in certain places of the conversation.

Figure 7.
Inside a lesson.



The conversation is a rather long one and suddenly there is a shift of how much the learners are exposed to language, which is a nice change.

Now comes deductive grammar instruction; the users are merely presented the conjugation of the verb ‘aller’ which means ‘go’ in French, accompanied with a native speaker pronouncing the verbs [Figure 8]. What comes after is the testing of the learners in the same robotic and immediate manner of the beginning of the lesson, merely asking the different conjugations of the verb ‘aller’.



Figure 8.
Inside a lesson.

In the next exercise the learners are presented, again, with a deductive and more complicated grammatical point explained not in French, but in English. There's the grammar rule and then immediately there are exercises following up on the same rules [Figures 9 and 10].



Figure 9.
Inside a lesson.

In the following exercises the learners get the same type of exercises that they have been exposed to during this lesson, and Babbel never forgets to test them as soon as it can with as much as exposure to the new material. For example, now that it has taught 'near future' and some vocabulary about travelling, Babbel mixes these two and tests the learners with questions containing both of these materials.

In the final parts of the lesson, Babel again focuses on grammatical points, but this time a rather minor one – preposition for places – in the same deductive manner [Figure 10 And 11].

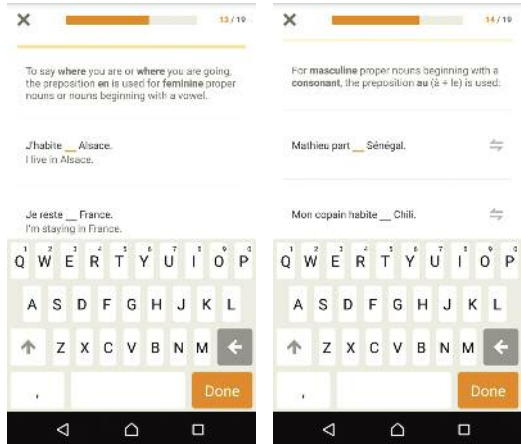


Figure 10 and 11.
Inside a lesson.

The lesson finishes up with some exercises covering all the materials taught in the lesson combined. Babel, as mentioned before, pronounces each and every sentence, phrase, and word throughout the lesson.

Evaluation

Babel can perform as a stand-alone to learn a new language but within certain conditions. One, which is very obvious, is that one cannot truly learn a new language by only using the free version of the app, although it can be used to get to know a language better and more importantly to have a quick preview of how the app works and how the lessons will unfold in the future so the learners can decide whether the app's teaching methodology works for them or not. Second, Babel's two most prominent features are deductive grammar teaching and heavy reliance on the source language, meaning if one wants to study through this app, they must know what advantages and more importantly what disadvantages these two approaches might have for language learning.

As mentioned earlier, Babel teaches grammar rules and vocabulary explicitly. After introducing a new sentence, Babel takes the time to explain and immediately gives examples of that certain grammar rule and then tests the learner on the

material. This is very convenient for the students, since they do not have to think very much on how the target language's structure and grammar is built. This explanatory approach is applied to new words and phrases too. As shown earlier, Babel teaches vocabulary, including words, phrases and even full sentences, in a direct way. The learners are presented the word in the target language, then they hear the pronunciation, and at the same time they are shown a picture of the vocabulary item and are given different translation of that in their source language. Again, this makes it convenient for students to learn vocabulary and it does not require a lot of critical thinking and context reading.

One of the downsides of this app is its heavy reliance on the source language. Nearly everything, except for the exact materials being taught, are given in the students' source language which makes the learning atmosphere too familiar. The learning atmosphere should not be neither too unknown nor too familiar for the learners. Nonetheless, there are many positive things about Babel as well. It is inexpensive – it runs from \$7.45 to \$12.95 a month, depending on the package the learners choose – its surface is modern and clean and its courses are well-structured, highly-organized, and user-friendly.

Conclusion

Babel is not a free app, yet it is inexpensive and popular. Compared to other language learning apps, Babel comes somewhat in the middle; it is not as popular as Duolingo, for example, but on the other hand, it is not as expensive as Rosetta Stone. We cannot exactly say how many downloads and purchases Babel has, but the website says that it is “#1 selling language learning app in the world¹”. We cannot say for sure, because we do not have the exact number, but since Duolingo is not a “selling” app and compared to rather expensive Rosetta Stone, Babel is much more affordable. The app developers have gamified its content which makes the materials more interesting. The app has been designed to be used in the learners' spare time, but it definitely can be used as a serious course for a serious-minded learner; it carefully nurtures the needs of both types of learners.

In general, Babel is a rather good choice for language learning; for some students it might work as an excellent language learning tool which helps them every step of the way, carefully building up the intricately designed courses, but for others the pedagogy may seem unimaginative. Students who want an easy-to-use tool

and a deductive teacher will love this app. Babbel gives the material straight to the students and immediately afterwards tests them on the recently learned material. However, many might think it is ineffective to be presented the direct translation of every new word and phrase and feel like they are being spoon-fed. Others may feel that they do not have enough natural exposure to, or communicative task types in, the target language, when half or even more of the app's texts and language are presented in their own native language rather than the one they are trying to learn. One must simply try out the free version of the app and some of its courses in their level (beginner, intermediate, advanced, etc.) to learn whether they can work with the same methodology for an extended time or not.

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TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Give Me a Break (Bag): A Home-School Connection for ELLs

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Background

In both ESL and EFL environments, the need for quality content-based instruction for English language learners (ELLs) is growing. In the U.S., for example, the Center of Immigration Studies estimates that in 2016, approximately 22 percent of children, slightly more than 12 million, spoke a language other than English at home, and these numbers are expected to continue to increase for some time. English Language Learners (ELLs) underachieve in comparison to their English-speaking peers in academic domains, and the achievement gap tends to increase the higher the grade level (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2010). Worldwide, the BBC estimates that approximately 1.5 billion people are students of English. Increasingly, English is used as a medium—not just a subject—of instruction in content-area courses in international schools, in dual language schools, and in academically-oriented high schools and in institutions of higher education, particularly in such global fields as business, science, and technology.

This teaching tip reports on a project originally designed for immigrant children in five majority-ELL elementary schools in northeastern Ohio in the U.S., but it holds promise for ELLs in a variety of other settings as well. Our goals were (a) to continue students' subject matter learning over winter break and (b) to create meaningful English language interaction for students who are often called upon to serve as interpreters for family members navigating the world of English. We created break bags, individualized, hands-on science and math experiments for children to take home and complete with their families over the break

Bringing Science Experiences Home

The idea for break bags came from Scientific American's Bring Science Home (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/education/bring-science-home/>), which fea-

tures family-centered science projects on topics ranging from building rubber band powered cars to lifting ice cubes with chemistry, Bring Science Home embeds key science and math concepts in enjoyable, easy-to-follow activities that require only common household or outdoor materials such as leaves and toys. Although most parents feel confident about helping their young children with behavior and social skills, as well as with math and reading, many feel less confident about helping their children with science. Break bags allow families of ELLs to support, and even learn, content knowledge along with their children without extensive planning, expense, or background knowledge.

Procedures

1. Identifying Appropriate Experiments. In addition to Bring Science Home, these sites also provide excellent ideas for break bag experiments.
 - City Science, <https://www.cityscience.org>, raises the quality of STEM education and supports environmental stewardship by using the natural and built environments of cities as laboratories for active learning.
 - Exploratorium/Science Snacks, <https://www.exploratorium.edu/snacks>, are fresh, exciting, hands-on, inexpensive, teacher-tested activities based on amazing scientific phenomena.
 - FabLab, <https://www.thefablab.com>, connects everyday life to the scientific process. Videos, projects, and resources bring science to life through beautiful, practical do-it-yourself projects.
 - Science Buddies, <https://www.sciencebuddies.org/>, has over 1150 project ideas in all areas of science. The Topic Selection Wizard helps users find suitable projects.
2. Preparing Break Bags. Once the activity has been chosen, assemble a prototype bag to determine how materials will be packaged. Be sure to include clearly-written instructions, a photo of the finished product, and a list of materials needed besides those in the bag. Most often, these additional materials are household items, such as tape and scissors, costing less than a dollar. Materials, directions, and pictures should fit in a one- or two-gallon plastic bag. For a class of 25 to 30 students, assembly of the break bags may take between two and three hours, depending on the topic and materials needed. (See examples in Appendix B.)
3. Preparing Students. The day before the break, open one of the break bags, show its contents, and demonstrate how to perform the experiment. Re-

mind students that they are expected to “teach” the experiment to their family. Then, repackage the materials and give students their bags.

4. Reporting Results. After the break, have students report on their findings and their family’s responses. They can prepare a lab report (see Appendix A) and, if desired, an individual reflection exercise, in which they discuss results of the experiment and whether they were surprised by the outcome. Guiding questions might include: How did your family respond to the experiment? Were they surprised by the results? What did they learn? Did you have any difficulty in doing the project? Would you like to do another break bag project in the future?

Language and Content Learning

All readers of this journal will remember a time in their career when, through teaching others, they finally came to understand elements of English that were not well understood before. When ELLs become the “teacher” of science concepts for their family members, they also come to a deeper, clearer understanding of science concepts than they would otherwise. In addition, they practice an interesting linguistic phenomenon called language brokering which refers to translation between linguistically and culturally different parties. The children of immigrant families assume the role of language broker for their parents and other family members when they accompany their parents to a doctor’s appointment, translate a letter sent home from school, or conduct transactions on the phone. They rarely receive formal training for this duty, yet their family’s day-to-day experiences often depend on their bilingualism.

Variations and Adaptations for Other ELL Environments

Although this break bag project was originally designed for young ELLs in the United States, the concept can be adapted for numerous other ELL situations ranging from secondary schools and literacy centers in English-speaking countries to international schools where English is used as a medium, not just subject, of instruction and to programs in English for academic and/or specific purposes in both ESL and EFL settings. These caveats and observations may be helpful to readers working in environments different from ours.

- Experiential learning activities, such as those described here, can help students see how their, often-passive, teacher-centered, study of English connects to real-world use in higher education or the work place.
- In many EFL environments, students will likely carry out the experiments in L1 at home, but they can report, interpret, and discuss them in English when they return to class.
- Roles, responsibilities, and relationships in families vary. It is important for teachers to understand students' home lives well enough to adjust the "teaching family" aspect of break bag assignments when necessary.
- Teachers may need to make adaptations in break bag materials or assignments to fit the environmental context in which they work. For example, an investigation involving seasonal observations or use of leaves and other natural materials may require adjustment.
- In many settings, teachers could enlist the help of others in designing and assembling break bags. For example, pre-service teachers working with us have gained invaluable experience in considering the needs of ELLs and their families, as well as the importance of attending to language use, not only for language learners, but for all their students. Similar benefits could be realized by calling on parent groups, school clubs, and older, more proficient English students to assist with assembly of break bags for younger, less proficient learners.
- Break bag experiments could go mainstream. In other words, classroom English lessons could be designed around the hands-on activities described here as break bags. Working in cooperative groups with their peers, students can realize cognitive and linguistic benefits similar to those described for teaching family members with take-home experiments.

Conclusion

Break bags allow children to interact with adults using advanced linguistic and cognitive skills. All four language domains—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and several cognitive domains are engaged in completing break bag tasks. For example, students must record data, analyse results, synthesize information, describe processes, ask for clarification, paraphrase oral and written language, and gauge whether they have accurately understood and conveyed concepts to others. The knowledge, confidence, and fluency that language learners gain from the teaching break bag experiments to their families are evident.

Following one winter break, parents of ELL students in a newcomer school were asked, during parent-teacher conferences, for their response to their children's break bag experiences. Overwhelmingly, they enjoyed watching and learning from their children's engagement with science. They expressed amazement at the unpredictable twists and surprising outcomes in many of the experiments. In sum, they reminded us that when family is involved in their children's education, students have a better chance of academic success.

References

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Appendix A

Lab Report

Write or draw what you did on the right.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Ask a Question</p>  | |
| <p>I Think...</p>  <p>Make a Prediction</p> | |
| <p>Make a Plan and Follow It</p>  | |
|  | |
| <p>Record your Results</p>  | |
| <p>Draw a Conclusion</p>  | |

Appendix B

Images of Break Bags



Water Cycle in a Bag. Students simply add water at home and a plant grows.



Noise Makers. Students discover sound waves.

Notes to Contributors

The *TESL Reporter* is a refereed semiannual publication of the Department of English Language Teaching and Learning of Brigham Young University–Hawaii and is dedicated to the dissemination of ideas and issues of interest to teachers of English to speakers of other languages worldwide.

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