

## **Creating Reusable Pronunciation Pairs on Keynote**

**Mary Nobuoka<sup>1</sup>**

*Waseda University, Ochanomizu Women's University, Gakushuin University*

### **ABSTRACT**

One of the best language-focused learning activities to improve students' pronunciation is drilling using pronunciation pairs. In this paper, how to create a template slide using Mac Keynote, including pictures to help students understand the meaning of the words in the drill will be presented. Teachers will be able to use these short drills in any class to help students become aware of and master the more challenging sounds in English.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of communication is to get a message across to another person. Pronunciation does not have to be perfect, but students need to be understood. A Japanese student who relies on katakana to pronounce English will most likely not be understood by a listener who is not familiar with Japanese. Although some teachers use katakana with beginners, using it in the classroom makes listening comprehension difficult for Japanese learners (Shimo, 2002). Students do not need perfect pronunciation, but they do need “reasonably intelligible pronunciation” (Morley, 1991). One activity that teachers can use to help their students improve their pronunciation is pronunciation pairs, also known as minimal pairs. Furthermore, preparing animated slides on Mac Keynote or Microsoft PowerPoint will save the teacher future preparation time – as slides can be reused – and make it fun for the students.

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

According to Nation (2013), one of the top 20 most effective language-learning activities is pronunciation pairs. This activity is categorized as language-focused learning in which attention is given to “the sounds and spelling of the language” and other discourse features (Nation, 1996). In addition to helping with speaking skills, pronunciation practice also improves vocabulary acquisition (Kimura & Ssali, 2009) and listening skills (Shimo, 2002).

Using presentation software with animated text to present the pronunciation activities can be motivating for students raised in our high-tech, digital world. Prensky (2001) writes that Generation Y, or digital natives, prefer to receive information quickly, have graphics instead of text and enjoy instant gratification and games rather than serious learning. Robinson (2013)

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Nobuoka has been teaching EFL in Japan since 1994. She has been using Keynote in the classroom since 2008. She currently teaches writing, speaking and skills-based content courses. Her current research involves students' perceptions of their teacher's use of presentation software in the language-learning classroom. Correspondence should be sent to: m.nobuoka@gmail.com

echoes this view stating that students have access to so much visual and auditory stimulation outside the classroom that it is no surprise that students are finding it difficult to concentrate on traditional instruction in school. Utilizing presentation software to do pronunciation activities is a form of edutainment, which will keep students' attention and increase motivation.

## **METHOD**

Teachers can use a variety of pronunciation pairs that focus on sounds that are particularly difficult for their demographic of EFL or ESL learners. Lists of pronunciation pairs that are difficult for Japanese EFL students are widely available on the Internet. Try out "The Tiny EFL Teacher" from the UK:

<http://www.tinyeflteacher.co.uk/teacher/pronunciation/minimal-pairs-japanese.html> or a longer list which included blends from TEFLastic:

<https://tefltastic.wordpress.com/2011/11/25/japanese-minimal-pairs/> .

### **Preparation**

To make the first template, the teacher should select five to six pronunciation pairs and add each one as an individual text in an arrangement similar to that shown below in Figure 1. The pronunciation symbols for the target phoneme can go at the top of the list. To find pronunciation symbols such as  $\int$ ,  $\theta$  or  $\text{æ}$ , which may not appear on a typical keyboard, copy and paste from Merriam Webster (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/pronsymbols.html>) or other pronunciation websites. Each text box can be animated to scale up and down so that the students see which word is being pronounced. These animations can be repeated in various orders (see below "Activity"). Each build should be set to less than one second to complete.

Pictures that aid in illustrating the meaning of each word can be added, if desired, and animated to dissolve in and out with each target word. Free clip art is available on the Internet and easy to copy and paste onto a slide. Finally, "Sound 1" and "Sound 2" can appear at the end for listening and speaking practice (see below "Activity"). Once the first slide has been made, it is easy to copy the slide with all the animations in place and then fill the text boxes with a new set of pronunciation pairs. The pictures or illustrations will also need to be changed.

**FIGURE 1**  
**A slide for pronunciation pair l and r.**



### Activity

As the teacher clicks for each animation, she should say the pronunciation of the word and have the students repeat after her. The teacher should correct any inaccuracies without pointing out individuals who are making the errors. First, work on one target sound and read through one list. Second work on the second target sound and read through the list. The next round, each minimum pair is focused on with at least two repetitions. For example, in Figure 1, the teacher will read as follows: lay, lead, lice, long, lug, ray, read, rice, wrong, rug; lay, ray, lead, read, lice, rice, long, wrong, lug, rug. Next, the text boxes “Sound 1” and “Sound 2” appear for listening practice. The teacher says any word from the lists on the slide and the students identify whether the word was from the list on the left (Sound 1) or the list on the right (Sound 2). Finally, the students do the same listening activity in pairs: Student A reads any word from the slide and student B tries to identify which sound student A said.

### DISCUSSION

This activity works well as a quick warm up at the beginning of the lesson. It is important to keep it quick so that students do not become bored from a long, dragged out drill. It is also helpful for the teacher to explain how the tongue and lips are positioned for more difficult sounds such as r, l and th.

Another activity that could be added to this is to have students record themselves on their smart phones at the beginning of the course term and again at the end of the term. They can compare their own pronunciation and report on any changes they notice. However, it is important to emphasize self-comparison over a period of time, and refrain from making any student-to-student comparisons (Morely, 1991).

## CONCLUSIONS

To help students with pronunciation, interactive pronunciation pair activities can be created on presentation software. In the long term it is time-saving for the teacher as many different slides can be made and then recycled through the term of the course or on a year-to-year basis. Keeping the activity paced quickly will add to the enjoyment of the students as they watch the animations of the target words and pictures on the screen.

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