Implementing a pronunciation component into a course syllabus

Charles Jannuzi
Faculty of Global and Community Studies
University of Fukui

Robert Dykes
Department of Communication
Jin-ai University

Kumiko Dykes
Language Center
University of Fukui

ABSTRACT

This article presents a specific plan for implementing and integrating a pronunciation strand into a spoken English course syllabus that lacks one (e.g., oral communication, English speaking, English conversation, etc.). The model also can be applied to ESL situations as well as the teaching of other languages. Rather than treating pronunciation as a secondary or marginal language skill or sub-skill, pronunciation is considered essential to successful L2 learning in other areas. That is, it is best taught as "applied phonology" in support of L2 learning using a lexical approach. By "lexical approach" it is meant that pronunciation materials should be based on the most frequent words of English and the vocabulary selected for a course syllabus.

KEYWORDS: pronunciation teaching, pronunciation learning, lexical approach

Introduction

Teaching pronunciation is not typically a major part of most current ELT materials, textbooks, etc. While phonology and phonetics remain required background knowledge for teachers-in-training, pronunciation teaching and learning typically receive little or no treatment at all in commercial ELT materials. And it is doubtful that most teacher training programs address in-depth how best to teach and learn pronunciation in institutional and classroom settings. Also, the syllabus schemes that control the construction and presentation of materials do not systematically address pronunciation, if at all. Teachers who wish to run courses with a major pronunciation component / syllabus strand may have to devise, plan, and implement it as a supplement to the materials that they are using. This article presents a set of concepts, methods, and sample materials that can be used for such purposes. The two controlling assumptions that inform this approach are that teaching pronunciation (1) is largely the pedagogical presentation of the actual phonology and phonetics of English (as part of language in use) and (2) is best kept lexically based, using, when possible, the most frequent words of English and the governing syllabus for materials.

The first controlling assumption--teaching pronunciation as applied phonology and phonetics--does not require a highly technical or academically theorized approach. Indeed, academic approaches are difficult to translate into classroom learning activities that beginners can understand and engage. Also, it is important to remember that the terms "phonetics" and "phonology" refer first to actual phenomena of spoken language (speech) and the psychological and physiological control of its production in real-time communication. For the purposes of this discussion, the highly specialized academic study of these areas of knowledge are, for the most part, not essential to L2 teaching and learning. This article, instead, specifies and emphasises teaching to encourage learning about how English is actually spoken in the speech communities around the world who use the language for everyday communications.

The second controlling assumption--the recommendation of a 'lexical approach' to pronunciation teaching and learning--is also related to global English for clear and effective communication. That is, EFL learners need not learn the abstract, ideal, isolated sounds / segments / units of academic phonology or the articulatory, auditory and acoustic technicalities of phonetics. Instead, they need to master how to use a sufficient, grammatically realized lexicon through speaking clear English for international and cross-cultural communications.

Basing the component on three types of analysis

Major points of instruction for pronunciation can be obtained from three types of analysis: (1) contrastive analysis of the learners' L1 and English, (2) enumeration and analysis of errors in learners' L2 (English) production, and (3) specification of relatively unique and idiosyncratic aspects of spoken English that might pose considerable difficulty for various learners of the language, regardless of their L1 backgrounds. The examples in this article are derived from teaching EFL students at universities and high schools in Japan. Most of the learners can be described as native speakers of Japanese. A considerable minority are now EFL learners from China studying in Japan.

Most of the phonetic and phonological analysis is based on comparing and contrasting spoken English with Japanese. And in the case of error analysis, it is also based on Japanese EFL learners' oral production. If the EFL teacher is learning the L1 of the students as an L2, it can also help in listing, describing, and analysing the points that can go on a pronunciation strand of a course's syllabus. When pronunciation in ELT is taught, it is often presented as a series of minimal sound contrasts that are supposed to hold within and across English. However, if both sounds (categorical sets of sounds) being contrasted are too strange to the English learners, then initially contrasting both together might be unnecessarily confusing.

A related issue occurs when a pair of problem sounds in English are identified and matched to at least one sound in the language of the learners. For example (and perhaps the best-known example), English / l / and / r / are often put in contrast to each other, but also compared and contrasted to the native Japanese / r / (which is described as a tapped, flapped or trilled sound). The question for teaching priorities then becomes: Which English sound is the Japanese / r / more similar to? The English / l / or the English / r /? And in any case, which English sound should be taught first?

Teachers (as creators of their own classroom tasks, as writers of their own materials) might examine the sort of pronunciations learners actually produce when speaking English. In the case of Japan, they would find that Japanese learners' productions of words requiring English / l /, English / r /, or both often contain errors where a required / l / sounds like an / r / but a required / r / sounds like an / l /. Closer analysis of the / l /-like sounds in production might also reveal them to be similar to English / d / or medial [t] in North American English (e.g., the medial [t] sounds of *butter*, *battle*, *bottle*, etc.), which are usually phonetically described as 'tapped r'.

English / l / and / r / as an example for instruction

English / r /, / l / and contrasts across these two distinct categories of consonant sounds are often cited as pronunciation and listening perception problems for a variety of EFL learners, most from E. Asia. The language backgrounds typically associated with these problems are Japanese, Okinawan, Korean, Chinese and some languages of SE Asia (e.g., Thai but also Cantonese Chinese). Other language speakers may also have an interest in improving their pronunciation of English / r / and / l /, including Russian and German EFL learners, since their production of / r / can mark an accent. Perhaps the most well-known group to have difficulty with the two categories of sounds is Japanese EFL learners. This may be because their native language background creates the most difficult problems to overcome, both in terms of listening perception and spoken production. It could also be because Japan attained economic affluence before most of the rest of Asia and hired large numbers of native speakers of English to help teach and model the language while large numbers of Japanese went abroad to study English. So, a lot of information based on knowledge and experience of Japanese and Japanese learners of EFL has been exchanged and discussed in the circles of 'global ELT'.

Narrowing the analysis to useful issues for instruction

In the case of Japanese learners of English, just what is the issue (or set of issues)? The most common accounts are based on a simple 'contrastive analysis'. Japanese is said to have one categorical sound (or phoneme)--whereas English has two. The Japanese sound is often referred to as a type of [r] that is tapped, flapped (or even trilled in some dialects, sociolects, accents, and idiolects). The Japanese sound category has a very limited distribution in the lexicon. It never closes a syllable. Moreover, the word-initial form of Japanese / r / is not found in native words but is limited to words of foreign origin (e.g., *ramen*, the type of Chinese noodles now a national dish in Japan, or *ramune*, a soda the name for which seems to be derived from the English word *lemonade*). The most frequently occurring form of the Japanese / r / is as the consonant onset of the syllables used in grammatical inflections (such as verb forms which are suffixes affixed to verb stems).

English-speaker descriptions of the Japanese sound--or of the Japanese learner of English's inter-language sound--represent the Japanese (or inter-language) sound as resembling English / l /, / r /, or / d / (especially [-d-] in the middle of a word, like in the word middle). Phonetic descriptions in terms of articulation have also said that the American medial voiced [-t-] (often described phonetically as a tapped r) of words such as ‘little’ are quite like the Japanese / r /. Another

similar sound is the medial [-r-] in British pronunciations of the word 'very'. However, it is not really clear how useful a cross-linguistic, contrastive analysis of phoneme inventories is in diagnosing the problems or in helping Japanese learners of English to overcome them. For one thing, the often-read argument, that Japanese has only one phoneme, Japanese / r /, is arguably wrong. That is because, using the same sort of old structuralist criteria for determining what is and what is not a phoneme, we can isolate at least two Japanese [r] sounds that are distinct: syllable-initial [r-], such as in the word *rou* (*candle wax*) from syllable-initial, palatal [rj-] in *ryou* (*dormitory*).

Palatal Japanese / rj / (treated here phonemically, hence the use of / /) can be found at the head of such syllables as *rya-, ryu-*, and *ryo-* (using Romanization that reflects how these are captured in written Japanese because they correspond the syllabic characters that would be used to write them). It could be that two other syllables *ryi-* and *rye-* don't exist because in such a position, the [r] is never palatal. On the other hand, it could be that because of assimilation with the following vowels [i] and [e], some palatal influence is already taking place. It should also be noted that for English speakers learning Japanese, both the Japanese / r / and palatal / rj / are problem sound categories that often require extra pronunciation practice. It is also misleading to teach EFL learners that there is one English / r / and one English / l /. That is because they will hear native and fluent speakers of English make a wide array of both sounds in actual speech.

The real issue, though, is: What is the same, across the possible set of [l] sounds that make them categorically an English / l /, and what is the same, across the possible set of [r] sounds that make them categorically an English / r /? Phonology--as an academic pursuit--has not really answered that question (that is, the vexed issue of sound category invariance). Phonetic analysis shows, in terms of articulation, that there is a wide variety within both categories of sounds. Interestingly (and perhaps confusingly for learners), the distribution in the lexicon of English [r] sounds strongly parallels English [l] sounds: word-initial (*right* vs. *light*), word-initial cluster unvoiced (*crime* vs. *climb*), word-initial cluster voiced (*grow* vs. *glow*), post-vocalic (*fear* vs. *feel*, *stir* vs. *still*), medial (*correct* vs. *collect*), and unstressed syllabic (*batter* vs. *battle*).

There is some complementary distribution if we consider clusters: [tr-] as in *true* but no [tl-], [Ɵr-] as in *through* but no [Ɵl-], and [ʃr-] as in *shred* but no [ʃl-] (except some loan words, such as Yiddish ones). On the other hand, [sl-] as in *slide* but no [sr-]. Interestingly, a dark [-l] can cluster with [-r-] after a vowel (post-vocalic [-r]), as in *girl* or *world*, but not vice versa. Moreover, since both of these sound categories tend toward being phonetically vowel-like (physically little obstruction in the vocal tract), it is not surprising that in some cases they might reduce to a vowel or vowel lengthening in some accents, dialects and word contexts (such as post-vocalic [-r] in the non-rhotic forms of English of London, Sydney, Auckland, Boston, NY and New Orleans. The two sound categories also overlap morpho-phonemically, participating, for example, in the negation prefix *in-/im-*, as in *incredible, immobile, irregular, illegal, etc*. (although in the case of the *il-* and *ir-* forms of the prefix, the [-l] and [-r] sounds may not assimilate with the preceding / I / vowel in the pronunciation.

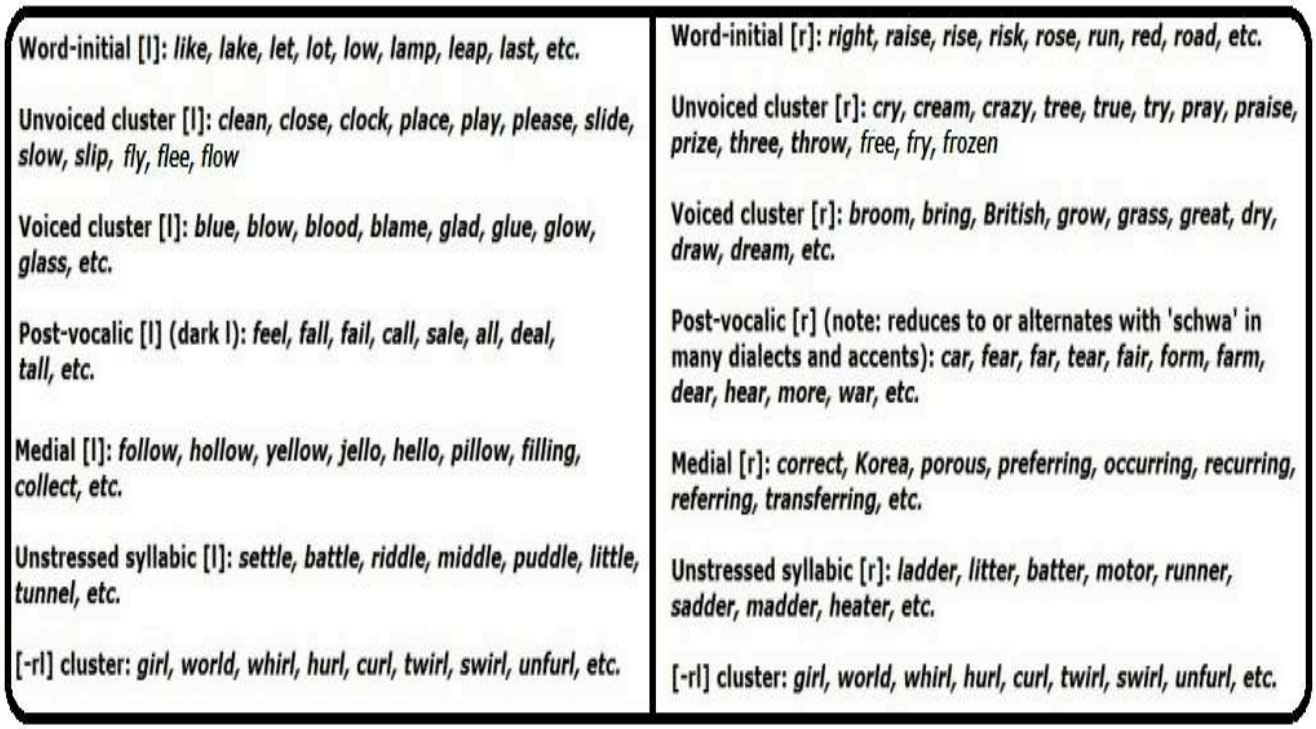
Given the variety of English / r / and / l / sounds and how they parallel each other in the lexicon English, it is little wonder that EFL learners, even after they have practised making an English / l / vs. / r / distinction, lose the ability when actually communicating orally. The one distinction that they learned (usually initial, unclustered [l-]s vs. [r-]s, e.g., *light vs. right*) gets lost in the

thicket of the lexicon. That is, in other words, there is a confusion among the various [l] and [r] sounds in all their positional variations. It would be better instead to teach pronunciation of the two sound categories over a period of time and through a variety of activities.

Teaching Sequence for English / r / and / l /

One line of reasoning is that English / r / is typically one of the last consonants acquired by native speakers. Therefore, it must present special difficulties in terms of articulation. So it would be better to teach English / l / first to EFL learners because of the inherent difficulties with the English / r / group of related sounds. A different line of reasoning that might support this first approach might be based on inter-language analysis. If Japanese has its own / r / sound, the argument goes, then Japanese learners of EFL would find it easier to differentiate and master English / l / first. However, as noted above, Japanese / r / and Japanese learners' inter-language / r / and / l / sounds are often described as sounding more like English / l / (or / d / or medial voiced tapped [-t-]) than English / r /. One possibility is this: that regular Japanese / r / sounds more like English / l / or / d /. But Japanese palatal / rj / sounds more like English / r /. If all these arguments are considered together, the issue of which sequence to follow starts to look rather difficult to decide.

If Japanese / r / and palatal / rj / are not acceptable substitutes for either English / l / or / r /, it might be best to start an instructional sequence with English / l /. The justification for English / l / coming first is that even English native speakers, in terms of production, typically acquire / r / close to last or last in their language development (in other words, English / r / is the more 'marked' sound category). So this complex set of [r] sounds often requires remedial practice. So one possible sequence of instruction (as a pronunciation segment of a longer class, such as 20 minutes of a 90-minute class) might be as follows: English / l / should be taught using the most frequent and useful words of English as possible (and teachers should be prepared to translate less common words). Then, English / r / also should be taught using the most frequent and useful words of English as possible. See Figure 1 below:



Word-initial [l]: *like, lake, let, lot, low, lamp, leap, last, etc.*	Word-initial [r]: *right, raise, rise, risk, rose, run, red, road, etc.*
Unvoiced cluster [l]: *clean, close, clock, place, play, please, slide, slow, slip, fly, flee, flow*	Unvoiced cluster [r]: *cry, cream, crazy, tree, true, try, pray, praise, prize, three, throw, free, fry, frozen*
Voiced cluster [l]: *blue, blow, blood, blame, glad, glue, glow, glass, etc.*	Voiced cluster [r]: *broom, bring, British, grow, grass, great, dry, draw, dream, etc.*
Post-vocalic [l] (dark l): *feel, fall, fail, call, sale, all, deal, tall, etc.*	Post-vocalic [r] (note: reduces to or alternates with 'schwa' in many dialects and accents): *car, fear, far, tear, fair, form, farm, dear, hear, more, war, etc.*
Medial [l]: *follow, hollow, yellow, jello, hello, pillow, filling, collect, etc.*	Medial [r]: *correct, Korea, porous, preferring, occurring, recurring, referring, transferring, etc.*
Unstressed syllabic [l]: *settle, battle, riddle, middle, puddle, little, tunnel, etc.*	Unstressed syllabic [r]: *ladder, litter, batter, motor, runner, sadder, madder, heater, etc.*
[-rl] cluster: *girl, world, whirl, hurl, curl, twirl, swirl, unfurl, etc.*	[-rl] cluster: *girl, world, whirl, hurl, curl, twirl, swirl, unfurl, etc.*

Figure 1. Positional variants of English / l / in parallel with those of English / r /

Example activities

Assuming that the teaching and learning of English pronunciation and spelling can be a small but regular part of general EFL or a speaking / conversation / oral communication course, then a suggested, possible sequence might be the following: First class, English / l /; second class, review of English / l / then introduction of English / r /; third class, review of English / l /, / r /, contrast of English / l / vs. / r /; fourth class, review and revise as necessary; subsequent classes, work on problem contrasts within and across the categories (e.g., *farm vs. firm, pull vs. pool, walk vs. work,* etc.). What follows is a look at some specifics of activities suitable for a variety of EFL classes.

Minimal pair drills

The traditional way to focus the teaching of sounds has been in minimal pair drills. There are at least two major problems with these as they have often been done in ELT. First, they force students into trying to make listening and pronunciation contrasts between two confusingly similar sounds before they have actually learned either of the two sounds separately. Second, many materials often choose relatively infrequent words in order to illustrate the sound contrasts. Proposed here instead, is, a positive presentation of sounds (not as minimum contrasts), across a variety of positions in words, using ones drawn from the students' textbooks, word lists, syllabuses, the most frequent and useful words of English, and English loan words that are well-known in the students' own language. This then is pronunciation teaching and learning as part of

a general lexical approach. Japanese, for example, is loaded with English loan words, and they make for very good reinforcement that there is an l / r distinction in English (for example, the English loanwords of 'running' and 'learning' are near-homophones in Japanese, *ranningu* and *raaningu*, respectively). Using the most frequent words of English and target vocabulary from assigned textbooks gives pronunciation teaching and learning an added lexical focus.

Classroom English for teachers to use in the classroom to introduce the topic might be like the following: *Today we are going to practice the English sound / l /. Let us look at how the English / l / sound is made in your vocabulary. There are actually a variety of / l / sounds that you should practice and learn.* Start with one type of / l /, the word-initial [l-] and give a few examples. Write them on the board and have the students say the words, repeating after the teacher's model.

Alternatively, have the students listen as you read out loud the words as spelled on the board, then ask the students to say them as you point to their spelled forms on the board. When doing simple listen-and-repeat, one point of emphasis is to have students listen to the pronunciation while watching the instructor's face when the words are pronounced. This is because visual clues on the face are often crucial to acquiring how to perceive and articulate a sound (or more accurately, the sound sequences and syllables that make up a word).

Then ask students to give other examples from the vocabulary that they know. If this yields few examples, ask them to search their textbook or class notes. Also, instead of the textbook, students can be asked to come up with words containing / l / using the vocabulary that refers to things in their classroom (*light, lectern, table*, etc.). Another way to elicit l-words is to write some simple sentences on the board from which the l-word has been deleted, such as:

1. _____ Biwa is the largest in Japan.
2. What kind of music do you _____ ?
3. When can you go to eat _____?

Continue the drills over the entire variety of English /l/ sounds. This should result in a board for a variety of English / l / sounds. See Figure 1 above (left side) for an organized set of l-words. After the class has practised saying all the words, practice some simple sentences in which the sound appears several times, such as: *I like lying lazily by the lovely lake.* Or, if students have dictionaries for searching down unknown content words, try sentences like: *I like lilacs, lilies, and violets.* Repeat the entire procedure for English / r /. See Figure 1 above (right side) for an organised set of r-words.

Teaching English / l / and / r / in contrast

The same sort of activities can be repeated for English / r / in the next class with pronunciation practice. One way is to start with a quick review of English / l / before / r /, even though the / l / - / r / contrast is not made directly. So a review of / l / can then be followed immediately with the practice of English / r /, using the same sort of simple pronunciation and lexical tasks. After these two lessons, the class is ready for a classic English / l / vs. / r / contrast.

Review / l /, then / r /, and then the repetition drills (or listen and read out loud drills) can be expanded to minimal pairs pronounced across the different types of the sounds: *low / row, light / right (or write), lies / rise, led / red, climb / crime, play / pray, glow / grow, blue / brew, collect / correct, feel / fear, still / stir, little / litter*, etc. If a word falls outside the typical word lists (of the most frequent words, or English loan words), it is a good time to add some dictionary practice to the pronunciation routine. The minimal pairs can be presented on the board as opposing columns.

See Figure 2 below for an overview of an entire sequence of instruction on English / l / and / r /. Under such a scheme for an university EFL course in Japan, the practice would take up about 1/4 of the time allowed for a pronunciation component. However, it should be noted that a thorough practice of the two sound sets would also include covering many other aspects of the phonology and phonetics of spoken English, both for oral production and for listening perception.

The teacher can lead repetition drills first of the / l / words, and then for the / r / words, and then a back-and-forth contrast of the contrasting word pairs (e.g., *light - right,* etc.). See Figure 3 below for sets of corresponding English / l / and / r / words in contrastive minimal pairs. Note, it is best to avoid a rising-falling, sing-song intonation pattern when practicing the contrasting words out loud in minimal pairs. Alternatively, the students can listen to an entire list being read and pronounced, and then be prompted to read the words out loud from the spelled forms. After word pairs, another way to contrast the words in short tongue-twister sentences that include both sounds, such as the following (it is helpful to start at the end of such tongue-twisters and work backwards with increasingly longer chunks, until students are ready to say the complete sentence from beginning to end):

1. ***I really like red roses, yellow daffodils, and white lilies.***
2. ***She likes to read literature a lot and writes really well.***
3. ***When I take a test, I feel fearful that I might fail.***
4. ***He likes playing pool, but he thinks bowling is boring.***
5. ***I really like lying lazily by the lake, enjoying the sun's rays.***

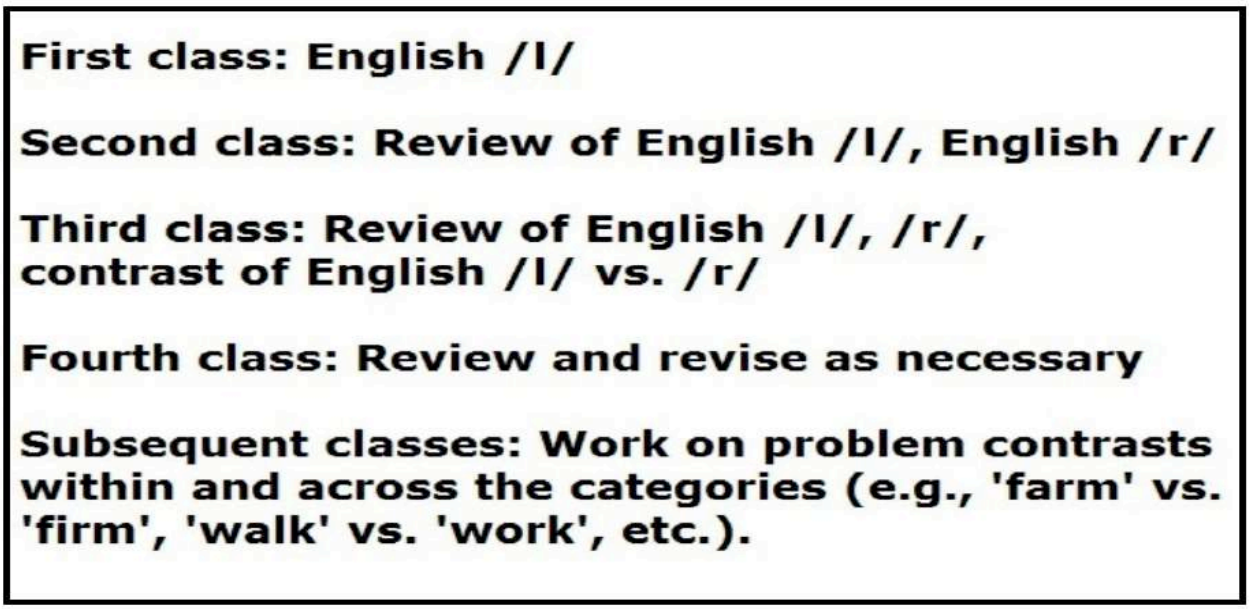


Figure 2. Proposed instruction sequence for English / l / and / r /

Having students listen and repeat words that exemplify and embody the sounds covers both listening perception and production (as well as phonological memory, short-term memory, and vocabulary knowledge). However, there is a simple way to focus on listening perception to see whether or not learners can perceive the differences in the categories of the sounds--that is, the minimal pair sentence cloze (not close) listening (gap-filling) task. The listening perception portions of instruction could also be done before the production-contrast phase.

Repeat an ambiguous sentence six times, plugging in one of a minimal pair, which changes the meaning of the sentence (such as one sentence from the list in Figure 4 below). Students number from 1-6 on their paper and then write an < l > if they hear the word with an / l /, or an < r > if they hear the word with an / r /. It is advisable to have ready translations of the sentences in the students' L1 because then they will not be distracted by language that they do not understand. Their comprehension helps reinforce the idea that what may seem like a small difference in sounds can make a huge difference in meaning. Note also how the sentences include other examples of / l / and / r / in use, which is an important aspect of realistic listening perception.

Figure 3. Minimal pairs juxtaposing English / l / and / r / in contrast

After such listening perception tasks have been practised, the entire block of instruction could be reviewed, revised and reinforced with an exercise that contrasts English / l / and / r / in minimal pairs. See Figure 4 (below) for examples to use. The cloze listening sentences in Figure 4 (below) could also be used as a longer review task. In that case, the teacher would say each sentence once, and students would mark an < l > or < r > a total of 11 times, once for each sentence. These sentences can also be used for practice of the sounds in more connected language, rather than just isolated words.

A streamlined instructional sequence

If students are at a more advanced level of English learning, a more compressed procedure could be used. The following section recapitulates the instructional sequence for teaching English / l / and / r / sound categories but in a shortened form. The teaching of / l /, then / r /, and then the contrast are condensed into one major step of the task sequence seen in Figure 5 (below).

Active learning tasks

Most of this sequence of instruction and tasks for pronunciation practice has been done as whole-class activities, but it is also useful to shift more of the performance onto the individual learner. However, there are ways to do this without putting learners under too much pressure so as to avoid students feeling embarrassed. Whole-class activities that send many students to the board at the same time are good for making students responsible for learning pronunciation issues but

without pressuring or humiliating them.

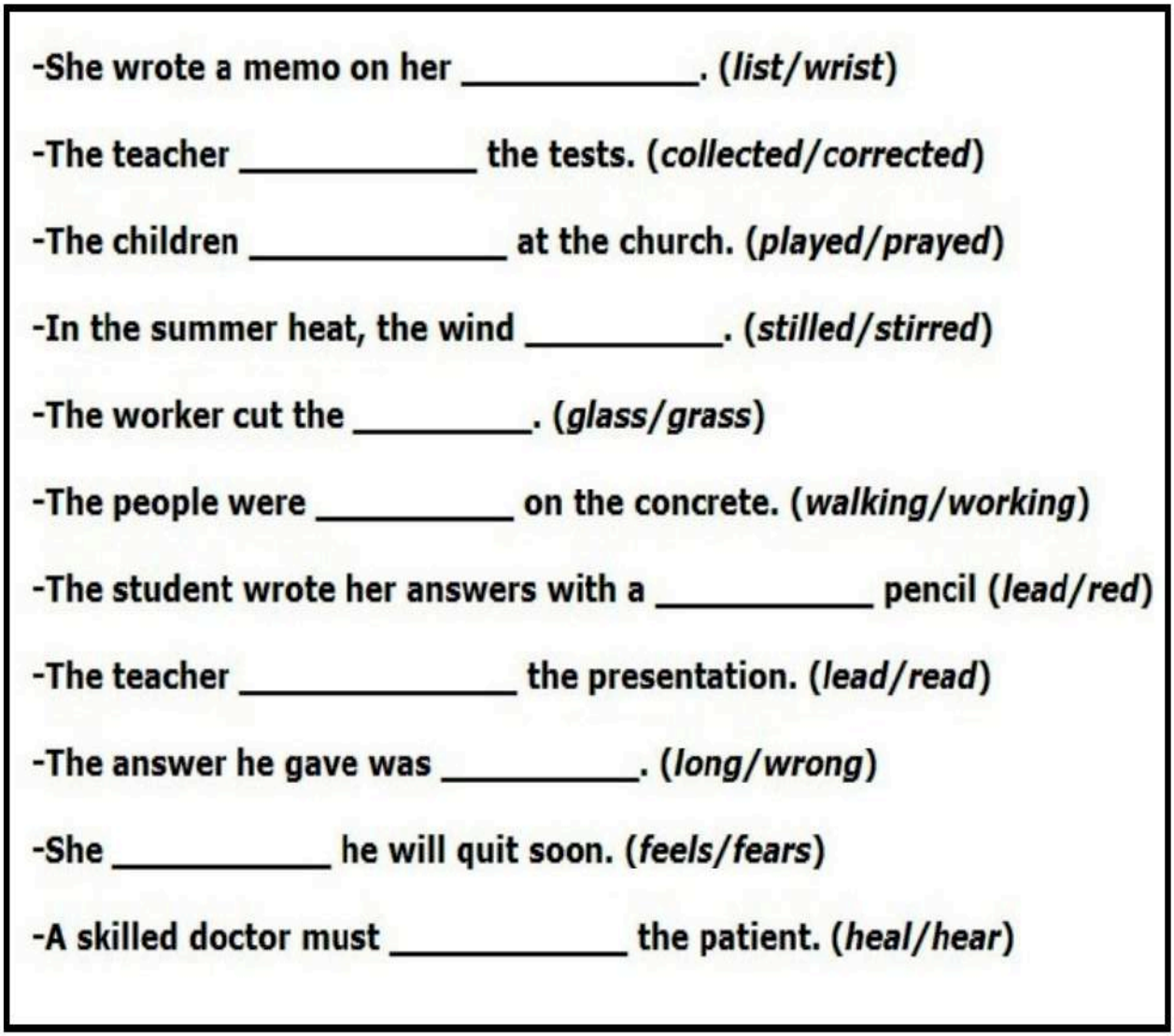
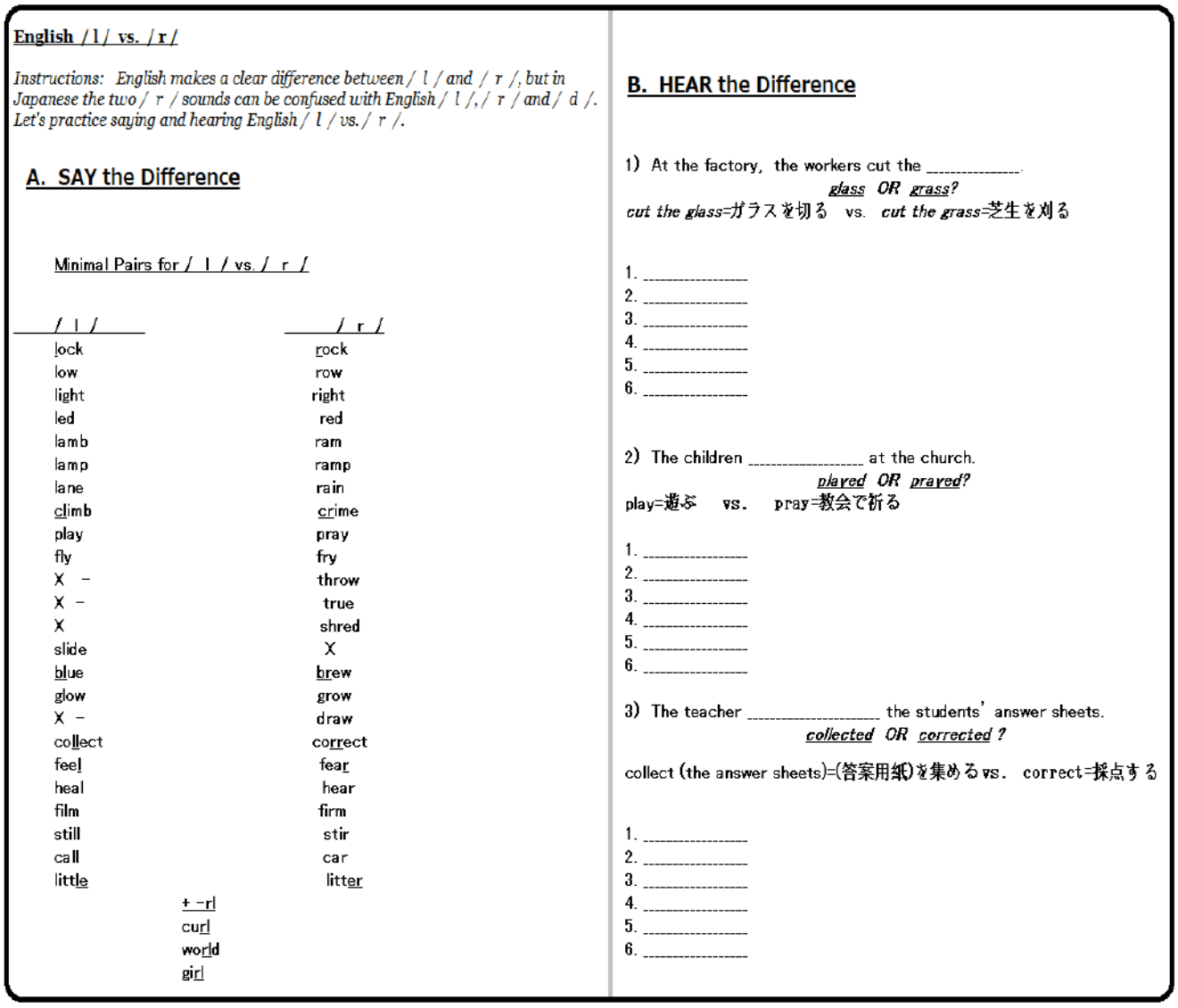


Figure 4. Minimal pair sentences for the problem sounds of English

For example, prepare a list of frequent, useful words that fall under one of four categories: the word has an / l /, or it has an / r /, or it has both an / l / and / r /, or it has neither / l / nor / r / (e.g., *like, long, low, bowling, flag, full, feel; red/read, wrong, right, boring, your, confirm; weather; curl, girl, world; way, day, decide*, etc.), until there is at least one word for every student. Next, divide the board up into four areas: 1/4 space for / l / words, 1/4 space for / r / words, 1/4 space for words with both / l / and / r /, and finally 1/4 space for words with neither / l / nor / r / (see Figure 6 below for an example board plan). Then the teacher announces to the class that each student will be 'given' a word to write on the board. Instruct them that the word will only be pronounced out loud once and that they have to listen carefully for their word and then write it on the board, in the correct space (e.g., if the word contains an / l / sound, it should

go in the / l / space on the board). It is often best to give an example of each type of word (one / l /, one / r /, both / l / and / r /, neither) and then write them in their respective sections. Students get their word from the teacher, who says it to them standing in front of them. Next, they go to the board and write on the board what they think they heard, placing their word in its appropriate section. After all the words have been placed in their spaces, the teacher can then compare the results with the master list.



English / l / vs. / r /

Instructions: English makes a clear difference between / l / and / r /, but in Japanese the two / r / sounds can be confused with English / l /, / r / and / d /. Let's practice saying and hearing English / l / vs. / r /.

A. SAY the Difference

Minimal Pairs for / l / vs. / r /

/ l /	/ r /
lock	rock
low	row
light	right
led	red
lamb	ram
lamp	ramp
lane	rain
climb	crime
play	pray
fly	fry
X –	throw
X –	true
X	shred
slide	X
blue	brew
glow	grow
X –	draw
collect	correct
feel	fear
heal	hear
film	firm
still	stir
call	car
little	litter

+ –rl
curl
world
girl

B. HEAR the Difference

1) At the factory, the workers cut the _____.
glass OR *grass*?
cut the glass=ガラスを切る vs. *cut the grass*=芝生を刈る

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

2) The children _____ at the church.
played OR *prayed*?
play=遊ぶ vs. pray=教会で祈る

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

3) The teacher _____ the students' answer sheets.
collected OR *corrected* ?
collect (the answer sheets)=(答案用紙)を集める vs. correct=採点する

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Figure 5. Minimal pairs and minimal pair sentences for English / l / and / r /

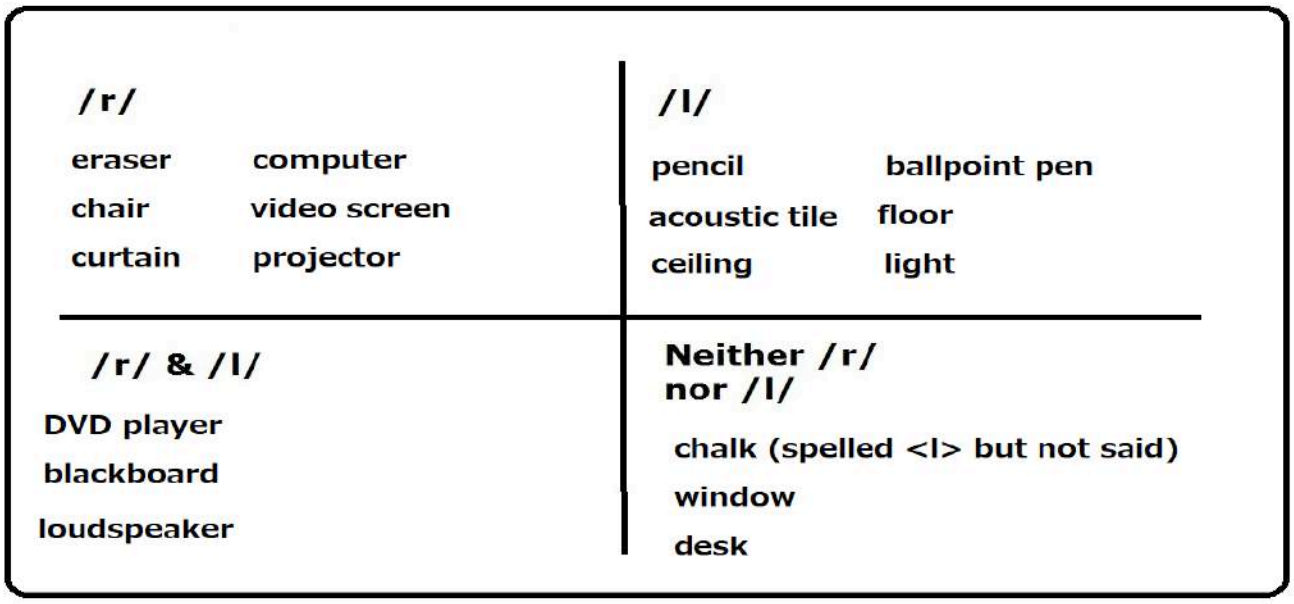


Figure 6. Board plan for practicing classroom English exemplifying / l / and / r /

This point in the activity can then be a good time to see how well the students perceive sounds. Sometimes a student's miscue will be somewhat surprising. For example, one student in a class received the word 'well' and wrote 'bowling' instead. This means that she might well have perceived an / l / sound but did not perceive the word correctly, indicating other sound confusions (e.g., the internal vowels or / b / and / w /). There will probably be some [l - r] inversions as well. Also, a word like 'walk' might get written in the / l / section, but there is no / l / sound in the pronunciation of the word. This is why the evaluation of courses, their syllabuses, and pronunciation tasks must be ongoing and take place throughout a course. Students' miscues that occur in the conduct of one course can be evaluated and analysed and used to add to the pronunciation strand of the syllabus (i.e., student-generated errors in English pronunciation).

The teacher can then do a correction phase by re-reading aloud all the words on the teacher's list, writing the ones that have been missed in a different color chalk or whiteboard marker in the correct space. Then the teacher can ask students to extend the activity a little further by giving still more words that fit under one of the four categories. Then the teacher can lead the class in a final review of repeating all the words as a final reinforcement of the / l / - / r / distinction. Alternatively, another whole-class activity is this: the teacher could have all students listen to the same set of words and put them in one of four places on a piece of paper (such as an A4 sheet folded into quarters--/ l /, / r /, / l / and / r /, neither / l / nor / r /). After listening to the entire set of words as read by the teachers, students can then compare their written results with a partner (then cross-checked with the answers on the board). This solicits students' discussion and cooperation in trying to master the sounds.

Still yet, another variation involves using either the blackboard divided into quarters or paper. But students are asked to generate English words that name the things found in the classroom. They have to come up with the correct English to refer to an object in the classroom and then

place it in the appropriate box on the board (/ l /, / r /, / l / + / r /, neither / l / nor / r /). The English terms for things found in the classroom include: *door, desk, window, glass, floor, light, fluorescent light, electrical outlet, LCD projector, computer, tablet computer, smart phone, DVD player, BD player, CD player, eraser, speaker,* etc. An additional whole-class activity is, having students listen for the word that does not belong, such as a set of four words, three of which have an [l] sound but one of which has an [r]. The teacher says the set of words out loud in a sequence of a, b, c, and d. For example: *a. wheel, b. beer, c. deal, and d. feel*. Students must choose which word does not belong and state the letter (answer: b. beer. All the other words end in a post-vocalic [-l] and rhyme).

Expanding to other problem sounds

The English / l / - / r / distinction is usually considered an important one for clear speech and avoiding a derogatory stereotyping of accent with many Asian learners of English (e.g., Japanese, Korean, Chinese). However, when these two sounds as categories are examined closely, what becomes obvious is, there is tremendous phonetic / articulatory variety of both English / l / and English / r / across the lexicon, dialects, accents, and the speech of individual users. Because of this variety, teachers, as creators of tasks and creators of materials, need to give many examples of how the sounds are used in frequent, useful words of English. The approach and activities in this article can be applied to other problem sounds and sound contrasts. For example, for some language backgrounds, English / l / and / n / can be difficult to distinguish and produce.

Also, English's large sets of vowels and vowel combinations are marked as difficult for many English learners, regardless of native language background (which interact in complex ways with the alternating strong-weak stress patterns of English). Japanese learners, for example, have difficulty with the phonetically (that is, articulatorily) adjacent English vowel sounds of *cat vs. cot vs. cut vs. coat vs. court vs. curt vs. cart*. In order to help teachers explore more problem sounds, two sets of information conclude this article. Figure 7 (below) highlights the problem areas of the English vowel sounds (presented in the traditional vowel triangle of phonetics, which is typically superimposed over a side-view cutaway of the head and mouth facing left). Figure 8 (below) illustrates the many consonants and consonant contrasts that create problems for Japanese EFL learners.

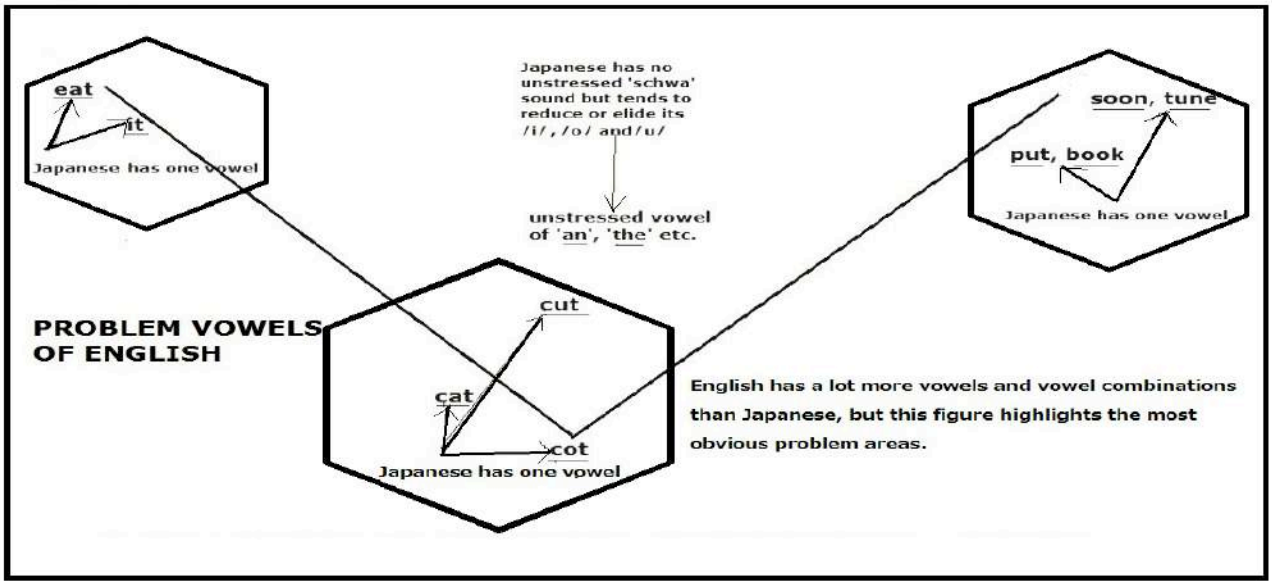


Figure 7. Overview of the difficult vowels of English

/l/: like, clear, glad, follow, feel, middle
/r/: right, cry, grade, carry, fear, butter
/l/ vs. /r/: light/right, climb/crime, glow/grow, collect/correct, feel/fear, little/litter
/s/: see, less, listen, muscle
/ʃ/: she, sugar, dish, passion, nation
/s/ vs. /ʃ/: see/she, bass/bash
/θ/: thick, think, thing, bath, path, math
/s/ vs. /ʃ/ vs. /θ/: sigh vs. shy vs. thigh, bass vs. bash vs. bath
/ð/: this, that, there, these, those
/s/ vs. /z/: sip vs. zip, bus vs. buzz
/s/ vs. /ts/: cat vs. cats, fit vs. fits
/z/ vs. /dz/: buzz vs. buds, phase vs. fades
/t/ vs. /ʧ/: tip vs. chip, mat vs. match
/ʧ/ vs. /ʤ/: cheap vs. jeep, char vs. jar, match vs. Madge, batch vs. badge
/ʒ/: pleasure, leisure, treasure, measure, beige, rouge
/z/ vs. /ʒ/: bays vs. beige
/f/: feet, laugh, taffy
/h/: hit, hat, hot, his
/f/ vs. /h/: feet vs. heat, feel vs. heal, foe vs. hoe
/v/: vase, vast, have, love
/b/ vs. /v/: berry vs. very, vase vs. base
/-n/ vs. /ŋ/ vs. /-g/ vs./ -m/: run vs. rung vs. rug vs. rum, etc.

Figure 8. A list of problem consonants and consonant contrasts of English

Conclusion

Typically, fluent, stable, and precise phonological competence emerges as the normal result of acquiring a primary language(s) or even second language(s) from early in life. It is one component of total language competence and control, alongside syntax, inflectional morphology, and vocabulary (including derivational morphology). Phonological competence is an ability to control one's internalized language at a level of processing beneath the word and lexical meaning. Its domain of control subsists as a structured, cognitively controlled sub-lexical component of language that functions for the purposes of decoding, encoding, processing, storing, and retrieving language from memory. That is, phonology controls phonetics, using phonetics to give a physical, material reality (acoustic, physiological, kinaestethic, phenomenological, etc.) to our spoken language. Therefore, it plays an integral part in our ability to communicate in a language, a primary concern of the modern L2 classroom. In this this article we have tried to describe, explain and justify the inclusion and development of a full-blown pronunciation component on the syllabus of courses, teaching spoken English.

Acknowledgement
Significant parts of this article are based on working papers and blog posts about teaching pronunciation published at the *ELT in Japan* blog, 2011-2018. This content was compiled, revised, and condensed for a workshop that the authors delivered at the MELTA 2018 conference. The workshop and the related paper published in the MELTA 2018 Conference Proceedings are titled, "Planning, Teaching, and Evaluating a Pronunciation Component for the Syllabus of an EFL Speaking Course". Additionally, bibliographical data for the blog articles are provided in a suggested reading list.

Rerefences

Jannuzi, C. (2011, June 16). Teaching English /r/ and /l/ to EFL learners: A lexical approach (parts1-3final) [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://eltinjapan.blogspot.com/2011/06/teaching-english-r-and-l-to-efl.html

Jannuzi, C. (2011, October 4). Teaching English /l/ and /r/ to EFL learners: a lexical approach [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://eltinjapan.blogspot.com/2011/10/elt-in-japan-issue-4-october-2011.html

Jannuzi, C., Dykes, R., & Dykes, K. (2018, August 13). Planning, Teaching, and Evaluating a Pronunciation Component for the Syllabus of an EFL Speaking Course [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iGmRirdPRsXCm_TlIkfzPpma97-7Rr1z/view

Author Information

Charles Jannuzi has taught EFL in Japan since 1989. He has worked full-time at the University of Fukui since 1994. He is co-author of the EFL textbook, *Core English for Global Communication*, published by Asahi Press in 2018.

Robert Dykes has been living and teaching English in Japan for over a decade. He holds a master's degree in Applied Linguistics and TESOL. His main research focus is language learner motivation and anxiety, but he has presented on many tropics such as CMC, grammar, and

quantitative research design.

Kumiko Dykes is an English teacher in Japan. After having taught at an English conversation school for a decade, she obtained a master's degree in English Education. Her research interest is in material writing and development, and she is currently working on a self-learning guide with simplified English sentence structures.