Choosing Tech Tools to Reach Your Pronunciation Goals

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CATESOL Conference, October19-21, 2017
http://teachingpronunciation.weebly.com

What should you think about in choosing technology?

- **Goals:** What tools will help your students reach their pronunciation learning goals?

- **Quality and accuracy:** Does a tool provide accurate information? Is it based on sound teaching principles?

- **Practicality:** Is it easy to use? Does it work reliably and do what it says it will?

- **Cost:** Can you find tools that are free, cheap, or already available?

Goal: Provide a pronunciation model for individual sounds and words

- **Sounds of Speech** (University of Iowa Phonetics). Website and app. Demonstrates individual sounds through animated sagittal section diagrams and videos of a speaker's mouth. Sample words are audio only. For Apple or Android devices. Basic version is free; full version is $2.99.

  http://soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/ or on the Apple App Store or Google Play.

- **The Phonetics** (Fuminori Homma, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies). App. Demonstrates sounds and sample words through 3D animated sagittal section diagrams. $7.99. Apple devices only.

  Search for *The Phonetics Interactive 3D models of oral visualization* on the Apple App Store. Information website: http://d3492jnbjg00z1.cloudfront.net/

- **Any dictionary website or app with recorded words**, like these (all free):

    - Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary (American English): http://learnersdictionary.com/

    - Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online (Both British and American English): http://www.ldoceonline.com/

    - Oxford Learner's Dictionary (Both British and American English): http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/

    - Cambridge Dictionary (Both British and American English): http://dictionary.cambridge.org/

- **YouGlish** is like a contextualized pronunciation dictionary. Search for a word or phrase, and YouGlish will find YouTube videos containing it and start playing the relevant bit. Free website. https://youglish.com/

Goal: Provide a model of connected speech

- **English Central** (https;//www.englishcentral.com/videos) A wide range of short video clips with scripts and quizzes. Also available as an app for Apple or Android. Free and paid versions.

- **Voicetube** (https://www.voicetube.com). Another collection of thousands of short video clips with scripts and some quizzes. Also available as an app for Apple or Android. Free.

- **VOA News Learning English**: http://learningenglish.voanews.com/ Some of the recordings are not the most natural model, but they're very slow and clear—easier for beginners to follow. Other recordings are more natural speech. Free.

- **TED Talks** (http://www.ted.com), **National Public Radio** (http://www.npr.org), the **British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)** (http://bbc.co.uk), **YouTube** (http://youtube.com), and many, many other websites with news, interviews, and other videos. Choose carefully for topic, length, speed, and clarity.

Goal: Record learners' pronunciation practice

- **Cell phones, computers, and tablets** have built-in sound recording capability and can send recordings by email and/or text.

- **Voicethread**: http://voicethread.com/. Upload a picture, which appears in the middle of the screen. Students record or type comments about it, which appear as icons around the picture. You can listen to the recordings and record feedback, though it can be tricky to match comments to students' recordings.

Goal: Record pronunciation practice creatively

- **Narrated PowerPoint or Keynote slideshows.** Add pictures or words, then record narration in the program. Prices vary.

- **Adobe Spark:** https://spark.adobe.com/ or on the Apple App Store. Make a simple slideshow by choosing pictures, icons, or words, then record narration. Free.

- **Puppet Pals.** Apple App Store. Choose characters and backgrounds, move characters around and record your voice to make them talk for an animated puppet show. Free, but extra sets of characters and backgrounds are available for purchase.

- **Voki:** http://www.voki.com/ or from the Apple App Store or Google Play. Create "talking head" cartoon characters, then make them speak by recording your voice or typing in words and hearing an artificial voice. Free and paid versions.

- **Fotobabble:** http://www.fotobabble.com or from the Apple App Store. Using tools on the website or app, users can upload photos, record comments about them, and share them by email, text message, or social media.

Goal: Let students check their pronunciation independently

- **Dictation** in Word, Pages, Google Docs, or other programs or apps that transcribe speech using Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR). If the program can transcribe what you're saying pretty accurately, you're doing all right.

- **Google Voice** lets users set up a special phone number that students can call to leave recorded voice messages. The teacher can listen to the recordings or read a machine transcription of the messages on the Google website (https://www.google.com/voice).

- **Pronunciation teaching apps:** There are many apps that say they analyze speech and rate its accuracy. Many don't work very well. Some give a percentage score or rating, but don't tell you what's wrong or how it can be improved. If you're thinking of using one of these tools, test it for yourself and make sure it does what you need.

Suggestions

- Think outside the box. Some tools that were meant for another purpose are also useful for pronunciation practice.

- Try out a tool before you commit yourself, especially if there's money involved. Read the reviews and get the opinion of colleagues who have tried it, and don't fall for advertising hype.

- Use what works for you and your students, not necessarily what seems newest or flashiest. If you can do just as well without high-tech tools, that's fine too. Choose the tools—high-tech or not—that will help you reach your pronunciation teaching goals.