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MEDIA REVIEW

Review of Advanced L2 Pronunciation Tool: BoldVoice

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BoldVoice

Product Type: L2 pronunciation application

Requirements: a smartphone or tablet, wearable audio device

Access: iOS and Android platforms

Available from: https://www.boldvoice.com/

Cost: iOS $12.50 monthly, $150 yearly; Android $16.70 monthly, $199 yearly. Prices vary during promotions.

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Introduction

Research highlights the critical role of pronunciation in second language (L2) communication because it impacts intelligibility and comprehensibility. Derwing and Munro (2015) claimed that even if a learner had strong grammar and vocabulary, poor pronunciation could hinder intelligibility. Given these concerns, BoldVoice—an automatic speech recognition (ASR) application—provides structured and accessible pronunciation training to improve fluency and effective communication in an L2. The app is available on both iOS and Android, and it offers a variety of lessons and exercises tailored to learners' needs. Users can practice pronouncing individual sounds, words, phrases, or sentences and then receive instant artificial intelligence (AI) feedback identifying pronunciation aspects that need improvement. BoldVoice was created in 2020 by developers Ilya Usorov and Anada Lakra. In 2021, it received recognition from the Google Play Store as one of the 'Best Hidden Gems,' an award given to lesser-known applications with innovative features.

Description

BoldVoice is a learner-centered application that offers personalized feedback tailored to users' actual pronunciation. At the same time, it encourages autonomy through self-paced modules and progress-tracking. These features empower learners to take responsibility for their progress and to stay motivated. Research has shown that the personalization and extended time-on-task provided by ASR-based systems play a critical role in improving learners' pronunciation (Bashori et al., 2024). Users can select lessons focused on specific sounds or intonation and access guidance provided by accent coaches in pre-recorded instructional videos. The application then delivers instant AI-driven feedback on their pronunciation,

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highlighting mispronounced sounds, comparing the learner's speech to the native model, and providing targeted practice recommendations.

As of February 6, 2024, BoldVoice is available on both Android and iOS devices. Recent user reviews have been highly positive, with an overall rating of 4.8 out of 5 on the App Store and 4.6 out of 5 on Google Play. An Internet connection is required to use BoldVoice. Users must provide an email address upon registration and create a password. A 7-day free trial allows access to the app's full content, after which subscription prices may vary by platform or through promotions. As of February 2024, a one-month subscription costs $12.50 on iOS and $16.70 on Android, while annual subscriptions are $150 on iOS and $199 on Android.

After signing in, users are directed to the main page of the application, which contains five icons at the bottom. From left to right, these icons are: *For You (*represented by a picture of a house), *Course, AI Chat*, *Resources*, and *Profile* (see **Figure 1**)**.** Clicking on any of these icons brings users to specific content sections. For example, the *Profile* icon allows users to manage their subscriptions, track usage, and access promotions such as referral credits. The *Profile* icon also includes a *Contact Us* button for reporting functionality issues. When it comes to the *Course* section, it is divided into 17 units, with each unit containing between 8 lessons and 44 lessons. Lessons typically begin with instructional videos wherein accent coaches provide guidance on the place and manner of articulation of particular sounds. Additionally, the coaches explain whether a sound is voiced or unvoiced, and they discuss the role of vocal cord vibration in producing different sounds. This explanation helps learners understand how airflow and tension manipulation affect pronunciation.

During a lesson, users can record themselves pronouncing target sounds or words demonstrated by the coach. After recording, users receive immediate AI-generated feedback displayed on a flashcard-like interface. For example, **Figure 2** shows two BoldVoice screenshots offering feedback on the pronunciation of the word "ambitious." The left flashcard shows the user's score (78%) and highlights phonemes based on accuracy. To receive more detailed feedback, the user can click directly on a word, which supplies a breakdown of phoneme-level feedback. As illustrated in **Figure 2** on the right, phoneme-level feedback provides comments such as "nice job" or "sounds like…", along with a score based on phoneme accuracy. This feature also includes short instruction videos in which a coach demonstrates proper tongue placement in the oral cavity for pronouncing specific sounds. In general, the flashcard feedback mechanism allows users to identify phonemes that they can pronounce accurately and those that require focused practice.

Beyond the feedback, the card on the left integrates complementary features designed to scaffold phonological awareness. Users can tap the *book* icon next to the word to access a phonetic transcription, a definition, and some contextual usage examples. The card further enhances learning through the *Coach* and *You* buttons, which allow users to listen to the coach and their pronunciation for a comparative analysis. To facilitate iterative practice, users may bookmark exercises that they wish to return to in case there is a need for more practice. For instance, if a user struggles with pronouncing "ambitious," he or she can bookmark the card by selecting the *Bookmark* icon, located directly to the right of the *You* button. This feature allows users to review the targeted card later.

Returning to the main sections of the application shown at the bottom of **Figure 1**, the *AI Chat* icon contains role-plays sorted by proficiency level and topic. Users can engage in simulated conversational practice with an AI chatbot in different contexts and receive pronunciation feedback. This service is subject to a premium fee of $50 a year or $4.14 a month. On the right of the *AI Chat* icon is the *Resources* icon, which contains four subsections: *Sound Library*, *Practice*, *Tests*, and *Games* (see **Figure 3**). For instance, the *Sound Library* allows users to listen to each English consonant and vowel sound separately.

In addition to the *Sound Library*, the *Practice* subsection is divided into *Practice Your Text* and *Bookmarks*. In *Practice Your Text*, users can type or paste word(s) or sentence(s) into the application. They can listen to AI-generated pronunciation and record themselves speaking. Then, they receive

feedback involving a detailed analysis of their pronunciation. The second subsection of *Practice* is *Bookmarks,* which will eventually contain sounds, words, or sentences selected by the user for more practice. In addition, the *Assessment* section of the *Resources* page provides a structured, 14-card pronunciation task designed to evaluate users' pronunciation. Each card presents a sentence that users should pronounce and record. After completing all fourteen sentences, users receive an overall percentage score with a corresponding proficiency level.

Figure 1

Course Page Interface

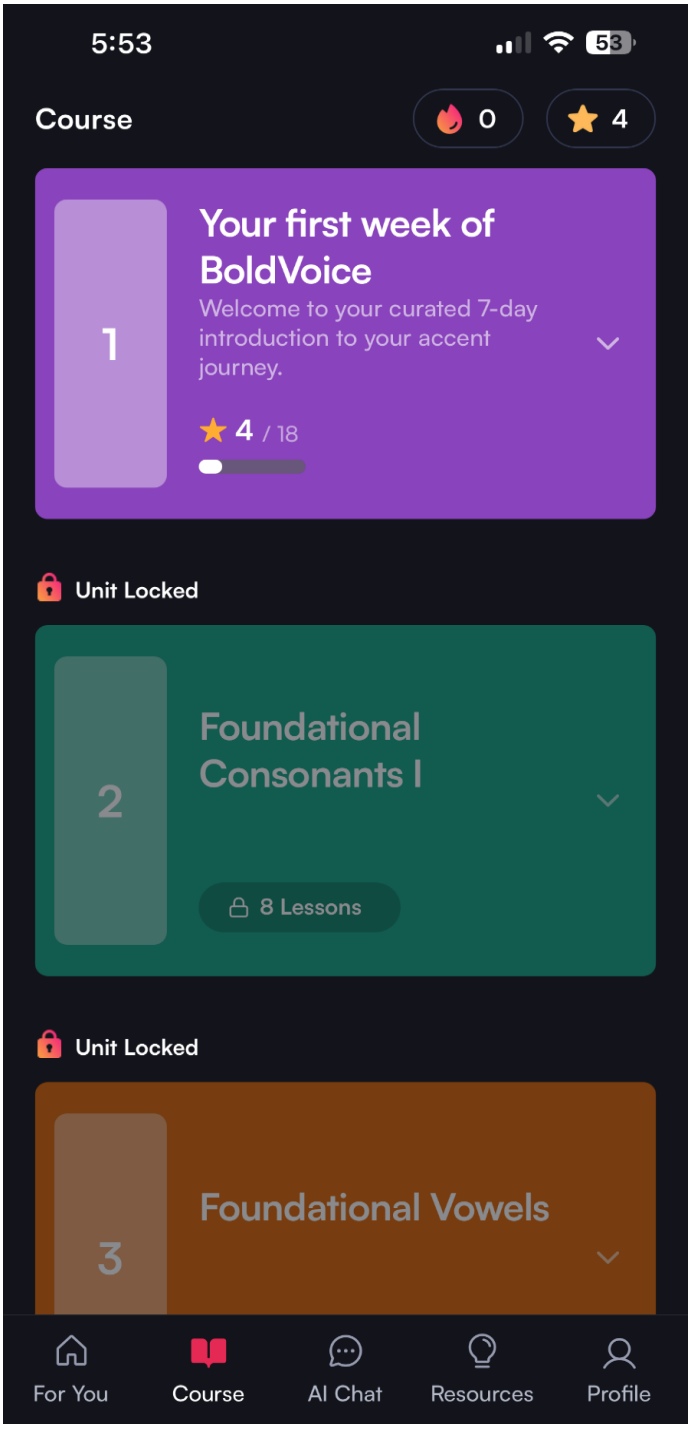
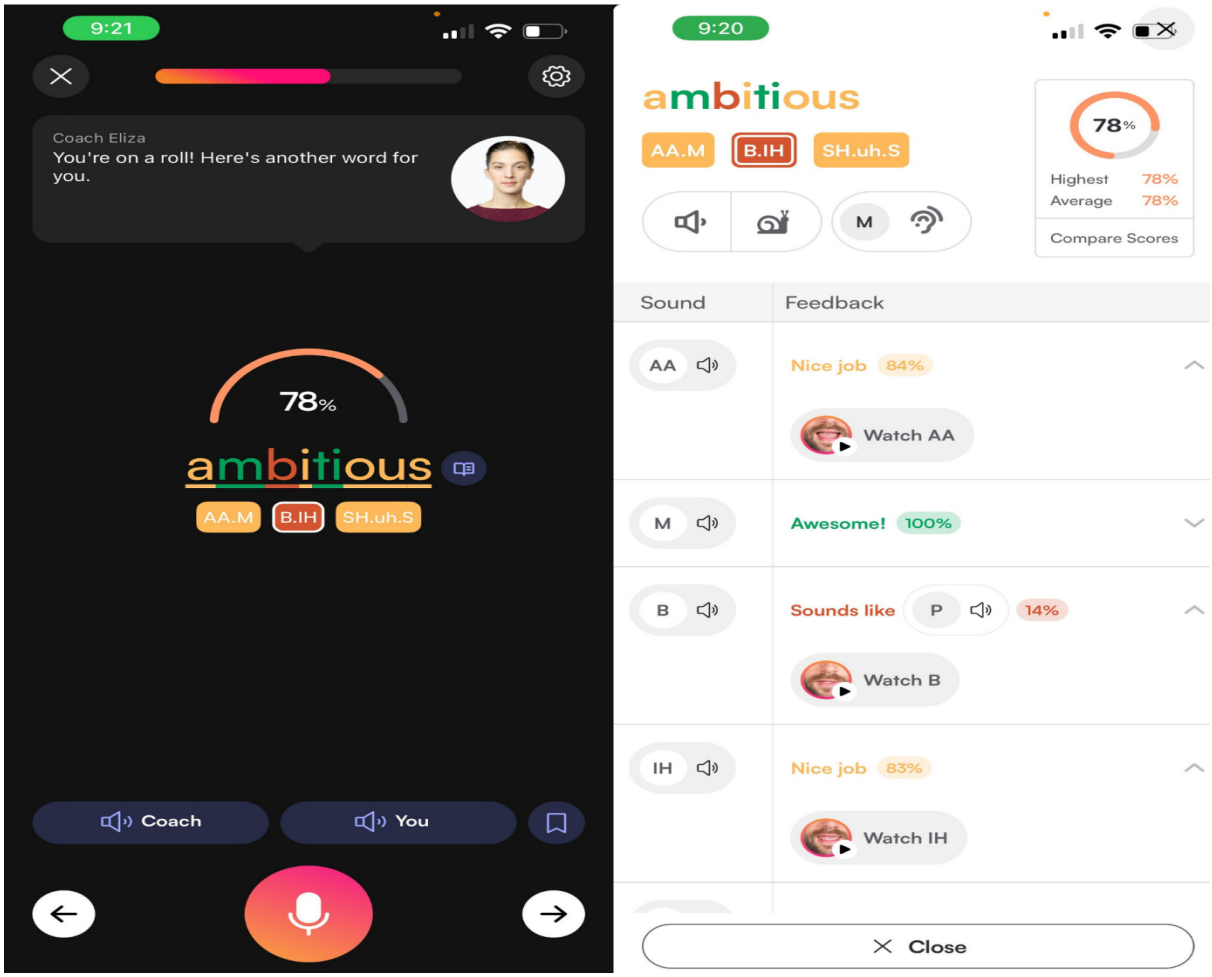


Figure 2

Flashcard Feedback (Left) & Phoneme Level Feedback (Right)



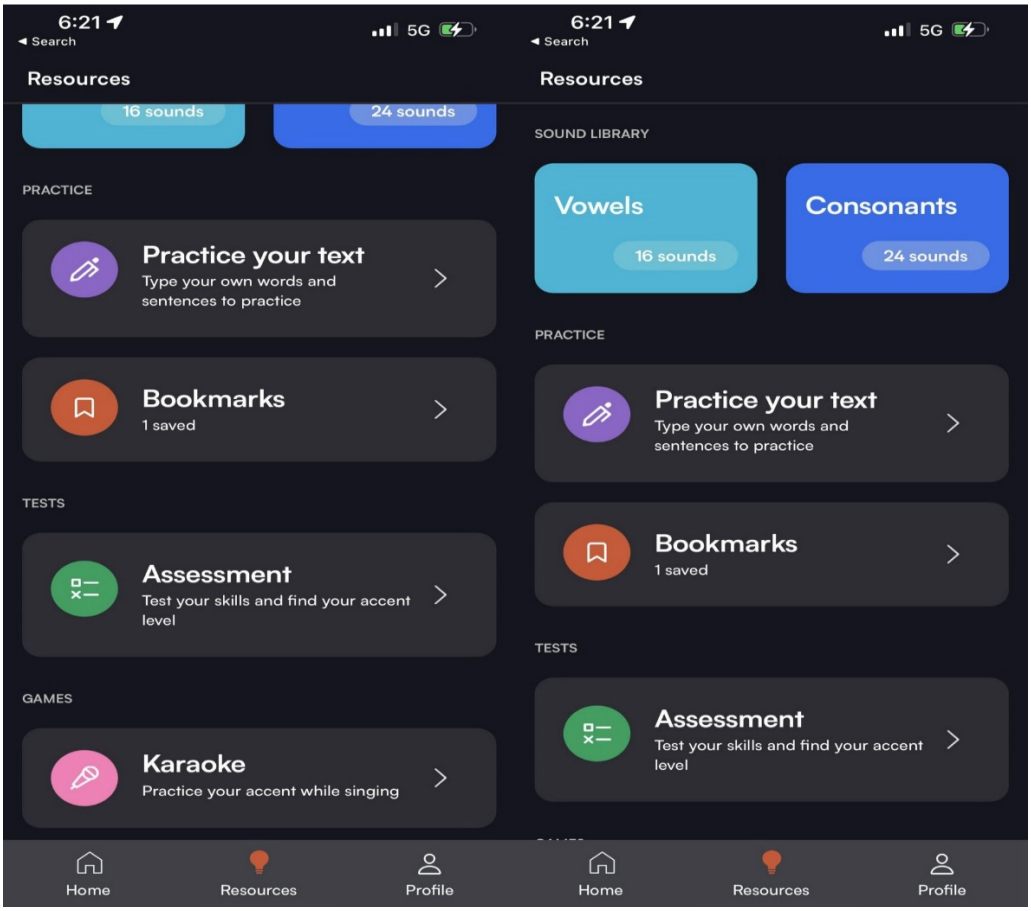
The last subsection of *Resources* is *Games*, where users have the opportunity to sing *Karaoke*. In this game, users can choose well-known songs from different musical genres. After selecting a song, users must employ a wearable audio device, as it is the only means to access the music and enable the sing-along activity using the lyrics provided on the app. The complexity of the lyrics varies from one song to another. For instance, it might be easy to sing along with the lyrics of slow songs, but singing rap songs could be more challenging, as rap songs feature faster tempos and more complex lyrical structures. After singing a song, a score based on timing and pronunciation is given, along with feedback that includes detailed insights into areas of pronunciation that need to be improved, such as phonemes and intonation.

Evaluation

BoldVoice is straightforward to download and install, requiring only a few seconds to complete the process. To evaluate its functionality, we tested the application on an iPhone 13 Pro Max and a Samsung Galaxy Note 8. The app performed smoothly on both devices without any significant technical issues. The AI-powered feedback is an outstanding feature, efficiently analyzing input and providing customized suggestions for improvement. The AI feedback was utilized by one of the reviewers, an L1 Arabic speaker of English, and it operated with no issues. However, the effectiveness of the AI feedback to accommodate accents from different L1 speakers was not tested.

Figure 3

Resources Subsection



Beyond AI feedback, BoldVoice could enhance learner autonomy and promote independent practice at a pace that is suitable for learners. This approach reflects Celce-Murcia et al.'s (2010) suggestion that pronunciation instruction should empower students by promoting student-centered, self-directed learning environments. Another feature that makes learning through the application enjoyable is Karaoke, which has been linked to improved pronunciation skills in numerous studies (Karsono, 2019; Rengifo, 2009; Murad, Wang, & Wang, 2018). Furthermore, *Practice Your Text* may lower anxiety since users can practice words and sentences using AI feedback on their speech rather than feedback from an instructor or peer.

Although BoldVoice is highly effective for pronunciation training, some refinements could enhance its accessibility. For instance, the application does not currently accommodate a wide range of L1 accents. To illustrate, Arabic learners of English often struggle to distinguish between /p/ and /b/, as Arabic does not include the /p/ sound in its phonemic inventory. Developers could enhance the app's adaptability by including targeted exercises for L1-specific phonetic challenges. Another area for improvement is that while the BoldVoice website recommends practicing for 10 to 20 minutes per day, this guideline lacks supporting evidence from applied linguistics research. Providing references to empirical studies on the optimal duration of pronunciation training would add credibility to this recommendation. In terms of teacher support, BoldVoice has yet to launch services that would allow teachers to monitor and/or track learners' performance and usage. To address this gap, developers could integrate teacher support features to enhance the application's utility for both learners and teachers.

Overall, BoldVoice is a highly effective application for learners seeking to improve their English pronunciation. The app's intuitive interface, AI-driven feedback, and personalized learning features make it an excellent tool for independent practice. However, expanding its adaptability to learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds and providing research-based guidelines for practice duration would further enhance its pedagogical effectiveness.

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Producer Details

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