

TECHNOLOGY IN PRACTICE FORUM



Teaching ESL pronunciation to international teaching assistants with the ELSA Speak app

Emilia Gracia, Arizona State University

Abstract

The demand for spoken English in professional and educational settings has inspired a revived interest in the teaching and learning of pronunciation in the past couple of decades. In response, innovative language learning software that uses Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to develop and improve to meet this demand. In an International Teaching Assistant (ITA) training course at a US university, an ASR-based mobile app, English Language Speak Assistant (ELSA) Speak, was integrated into the course curriculum as a supplemental tool for daily pronunciation practice. In this TIP Forum article, the benefits and challenges of integrating the app are reported. ELSA Speak provided ITAs with limitless and individualized pronunciation practice and feedback, reaching beyond limitations of a human instructor. While learners benefitted from the continuous practice, comprehending the feedback they received from the app was occasionally challenging. In addition, solutions addressing the institutional and economic constraints for technology tool integration are discussed in this article so that practitioners may consider permanent adaptation models that are sustainable.

Keywords: L2 pronunciation; mobile-assisted language learning; artificial intelligence; international teaching assistant

Language(s) Learned in This Study: English

APA Citation: Gracia, E. (2025). Teaching ESL pronunciation to international teaching assistants with the ELSA Speak app. *Language Learning & Technology*, 29(1), 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/73658>

Introduction

Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)-based Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT) tools, such as English Language Speech Assistant (ELSA) Speak (ELSA Corp., 2025), have recently captivated the interest of English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors and learners worldwide. ELSA Speak is a mobile application (app) that uses ASR and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify pronunciation challenges, create personalized learning plans, display instructional videos about target pronunciation features (intonation, stress, vowels, consonants, etc.), provide limitless practice exercises with immediate, descriptive feedback (global and specific), and conversation practice according to learner areas of interest (English for Specific Purposes, movies, sports, music, etc.). Though ELSA Speak was not designed for classroom use specifically (as it only supports individual practice), ESL instructors may consider it an attractive tool to incorporate into an existing course curriculum if they seek to enhance independent practice among learners, outside of the classroom. This tool is especially helpful in contexts where students represent a variety of first languages (L1s), and the teacher cannot practically address all language groups' pronunciation needs equally in class. Likewise, a tool like ELSA Speak could serve as a viable solution in an instructional scenario where, for example, an ESL instructor has learners who demand Pronunciation Instruction (PI) but the instructor is hesitant to teach it; in such a case, they can incorporate an ASR-based CAPT tool like ELSA Speak into their lessons to satisfy this request.

* **Corresponding Author:** Emilia Gracia, Emilia.Gracia@asu.edu

The scenario described above is not uncommon, and discomfort or uncertainty surrounding PI is a reality for many ESL instructors globally. At present, PI is absent in many ESL classrooms (Levis & Grant, 2003) and this has much to do with how ESL has been taught over the past few decades. As Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) became an international standard of ESL instruction and spoken English was desired in professional settings (Graddol, 2006), ESL instructors have focused more on oral communication in the classroom, and less on explicit instruction on linguistic forms. Under this paradigm, it is assumed that there is no need to teach pronunciation because learners would acquire it on their own. Therefore, the absence of PI in today's ESL classrooms is likely due to the prevalence of the CLT approach (Levis & Grant, 2003), and the reality that many ESL instructors lack formal training in PI and adequate PI resources (Baker & Murphy, 2011). In addition to lack of training and resources, the idea that pronunciation is very much part of speaker language identity and influenced by social and psychological factors (Douglas Fir Group, 2016) should not be ignored. The reality of many non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), especially in EFL contexts, is that the teacher may hold negative self-perceptions of their own English pronunciation or lack the confidence to model the target pronunciation to their students (Jenkins, 2007).

Regardless of instructors' skills and capacities, learners may have personal and professional goals they want to achieve and improving pronunciation, in many cases, will help them achieve these goals. Hence, whatever learner pronunciation goals may be, present day learners do desire PI to help them achieve their goals (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Considering the efficacy of PI, there is evidence suggesting its impact on improving learner pronunciation (Lee et al., 2015), and various studies have demonstrated that using ASR-based CAPT tools for PI has positive effects on pronunciation improvement (e.g., Chen et al., 2014; Tseng et al., 2022), with some showing significant improvement for ASR-CAPT tool treatment groups over non-ASR-based CAPT tool control groups (e.g., Liakin et al., 2014; Tejedor-Garcia et al., 2020), and that ASR-based CAPT tools are most effective when used in a controlled, instructor-led, classroom setting where pronunciation activities are assigned by the teacher (e.g., Garcia et al. 2020). The major affordance of ASR-based CAPT tools is their ability to give immediate, corrective, personalized feedback, and learner improvement in pronunciation is largely due to this.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that not all ASR-based CAPT tools are created equally, and teachers who want to use these tools ought to be aware of this. For example, McCrocklin (2019) found that the use of ASR-based CAPT tools for PI rendered negative results due to the technical fallibility of the ASR software which caused learners to receive incorrect negative feedback; consequently, learners reported frustration in these cases. Likewise, even if feedback is accurate, the quality and comprehensibility of the feedback is important to learners, as found in Liakin et al. (2014) and McCrocklin (2019) where learners reported disappointment with the feedback because it lacked specific examples and instructions on how to produce the target pronunciation features accurately. Indeed, the quality of the ASR software has a notable impact on the efficacy of the tool; therefore, before requiring students to use the tool, the teacher should test it to evaluate the how well it recognizes audio input and the level of detail offered in the feedback, as this will help them anticipate any issues learners may have during use.

In short, the realities of PI and pronunciation learning today necessitate thoughtful, instructional solutions such as the integration of ASR-based CAPT tools, like the ELSA Speak mobile app, into an existing course curriculum to help learners reach their pronunciation goals. For ESL instructors, the pending question is not, "Can my students use this tool to improve their pronunciation?" but rather, "How can I integrate this tool into my course curriculum in ways that support PI and result in pronunciation improvement?" As an ESL instructor who trains International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) in pronunciation, I aimed to answer this question by piloting the integration of an ASR-based CAPT mobile app tool into my ITA Training course curriculum. Thus, in this TIP Forum article, I seek to contribute to ongoing discussions about how we as language teachers can leverage the affordances of mobile apps and AI-enhanced language learning tools in our contexts. In the following sections, I will explain the context in which I teach, the reasons for adapting the tool, how I adapted the tool to for continued use (post pilot), the benefits and challenges I faced, lessons I learned in the process, and final recommendations for

teachers who are considering adopting similar tools in the future.

Instructional Context

I am an ESL instructor in an Intensive English Program (IEP) at a large, public university in the United States where all university faculty, staff, and students have access to cutting-edge technology, high-speed internet, and technological devices. We serve thousands of undergraduate and graduate international students who represent a wide range of majors (e.g., Biochemistry, Business, Engineering, Music). Our international graduate students typically have advanced English language proficiency (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages levels B2-C2), are between the ages of 25-35 years old, are from China, India, and Iran (primarily), and are enrolled in a variety of PhD and Masters programs (with Engineering being the most prevalent major). For program admission, international graduate students (from countries where English is not the primary official language) are required obtain overall score of 6.5 on the IELTS or 80 on the TOEFL iBT for graduate program admission; however, if their score on the speaking section of either test does not meet the minimum requirement of 8 on the IELTS or 26 on the TOEFL, they do not automatically qualify for a Teaching Assistantship. Students who do not meet this requirement are given two options: (1) take a special oral proficiency test offered by the university and get a passing score, or, (2) take the ITA Training course and get a passing score on the final evaluation. If students do not get their desired score on the final evaluation of the ITA Training course, they are allowed to retake the course. Likewise, they may also retake the oral proficiency test as many times as needed.

Typically, 10-30 students enroll in the ITA Training course, and most of the students are in the course because they did not obtain the required minimum score on the oral proficiency test – not because they desire PI or teacher training. On average, 75% of the students who take the course earn a passing score the first time they take it. The ITA Training course is a high-stakes course; if students do not get the minimum required score on the course final evaluation, then they are not eligible for a Teaching Assistantship, and this can be detrimental to students who do not have alternative funding sources. Unfortunately, in some students' cases, the absence of a Teaching Assistantship leaves them with no option other than exiting the program and returning to their home country.

The ITA Training course is a one-semester course that meets for three hours per week in person (or synchronously on Zoom) to practice oral communication, presentations, impromptu speech, general pronunciation, and teaching strategies. Three additional hours of asynchronous online work is required, including readings, videos, and automated quizzes that introduce and evaluate knowledge of the course content. The course consists of five modules; modules 1-4 focus on different teaching strategies and pronunciation features, while the fifth module is the final evaluation. At the end of each module, students give a microteaching presentation in class. When students present, I video-record and upload recordings to the course learning management system (LMS) (to each student privately), and provide students with detailed feedback on their pronunciation, language use, content, visual aids, and communication. These end-of-module assignments serve as the primary source of individualized feedback on students' pronunciation, as in-class activities are mostly used for group discussions and communication activities with peer-to-peer interaction. With this curriculum design, students get plenty of speaking practice but very little focused pronunciation practice and feedback, as pronunciation practice and feedback are limited to teacher recommendations for improvement on four recorded presentations and whole-class activities.

The course concludes with a final evaluation where students give a microteaching demonstration in front of a panel of judges (other ESL instructors from my department). Judges determine if ITAs speak intelligibly enough to teach undergraduate courses in their respective fields by evaluating several aspects of their microteaching demonstration (pronunciation, lesson delivery, language use, visual aids, quality of content, etc.). Therefore, the purpose of the ITA Training course is to give potential ITAs the opportunity to improve their pronunciation (as well as teaching skills) under the guidance of an ESL instructor/teacher trainer, and then demonstrate their ability to teach a lesson in their field with intelligible speech.

Having been the primary instructor for this course as of 2022, I consistently seek ways to improve learning outcomes and student experiences. Upon being given the responsibility to lead the course, I began to review areas for improvement, especially in the use of technology, as the previous curriculum was almost entirely paper-based. Aside from dividing the course into modules on our LMS and adding instructional videos, assignments, and quizzes, I sought technological tools that would help identify student pronunciation needs, and provide instructional support, practice, and feedback. I searched for such tools after realizing that, in teaching an ITA Training course with students from several different language groups and levels of oral proficiency, I was not able to identify all students' areas of improvement equally, provide abundant practice activities that meet every student's needs, nor offer detailed feedback for said practices. I imagined that it would be helpful for students to practice as much as they needed individually and get immediate feedback in the process, and that I alone could not provide my students with this.

In realizing that my limitations could not extend to giving my students repeated, limitless, individual practice exercises with immediate feedback, I began my quest for technological tools to meet this need. In my search, I encountered ELSA Speak – an AI-enhanced mobile app that was being advertised on social media. The advertisements associated with this tool were mainly targeted towards individuals who live and work in Anglophone countries (such as the US) and want to improve their pronunciation to meet professional and personal goals. The advertisements promised “native-sounding” speech in a matter of months of using the app on a daily basis. While, as an instructional professional of ESL who champions the CLT approach, I am weary of such claims and generally reject *nativeness* as a goal for learners, I was intrigued by the ASR and AI capabilities of this tool. I imagined that my students could easily download the app to their phones, and use it to practice their pronunciation, privately, in the comfort of their home, while getting immediate feedback. I thought that, surely, this would lead to progress and improvement that would otherwise not be possible with my limited feedback on presentations over the duration of a semester.

Description of Teaching Practices

Acquiring the Tool

After contacting a sales representative from ELSA Speak, I was given a semester-long free trial with 12 student accounts and one instructor account. The instructor account included a teacher dashboard showing how often and for how long students were using the app, in addition to their general performance on practice activities. The software company recommended that users get 20 minutes of daily pronunciation practice on the app, at least five days per week, in order to see improvement within three months. Taking this recommendation into consideration, I decided to integrate tool into the ITA course curriculum as homework. Being as the practice activities are individual and best completed when one is alone or in a quiet room, requiring app use as homework made the most sense. Likewise, as each student's pronunciation needs are different (e.g., some students may want or need more practice than others, and sounds of focus will differ among language groups), I decided to require 5–20 minutes per day, five days per week, and assign this as weekly homework.

Planning the Evaluation of Tool Use

The software company that created this app did not offer LMS integration, so in the course LMS, I included a column for this specific homework requirement, rewarding 10 points to students who completed 25–100 or more minutes of practice on the app per week and zero points to students who did not meet the minimum goal of 25 minutes per week. I did not observe daily app use nor reward points on a daily basis, as this would have been too restrictive for students who needed flexibility – as well as a greater administrative burden on the teacher. I did not assign any specific pronunciation practices or tasks via the teacher dashboard because I wanted to ensure that students had the freedom to practice according to their specific needs and interests. At the end of each week, I logged into the teacher dashboard, set a filter for the days I wanted to view, and was able to see how much time each student spent on the app (see

Figure 1). Then, I recorded either 10 points or zero points for each student’s homework assignment in the LMS gradebook, indicating completion of homework or lack thereof.

Figure 1

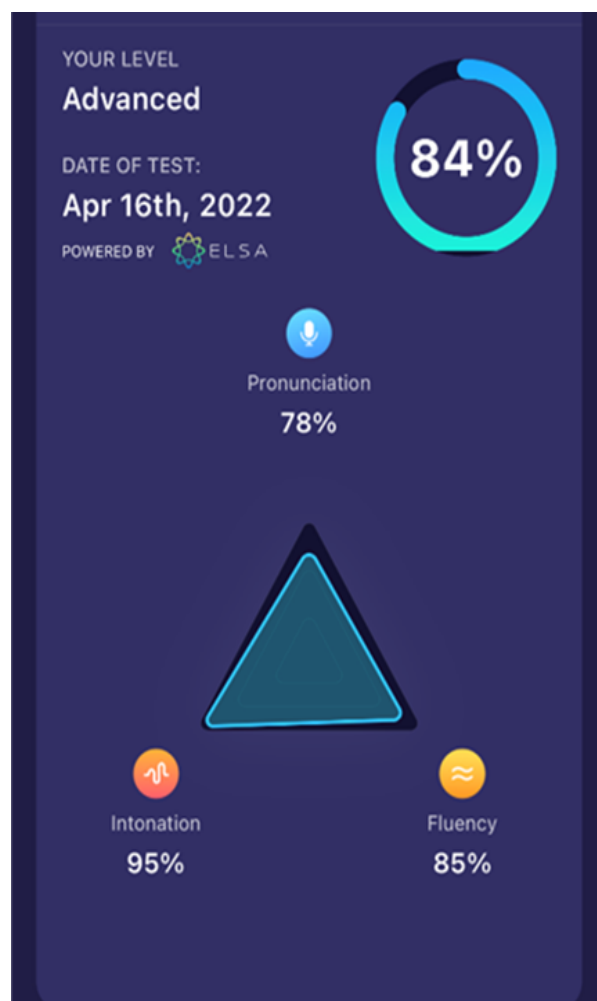
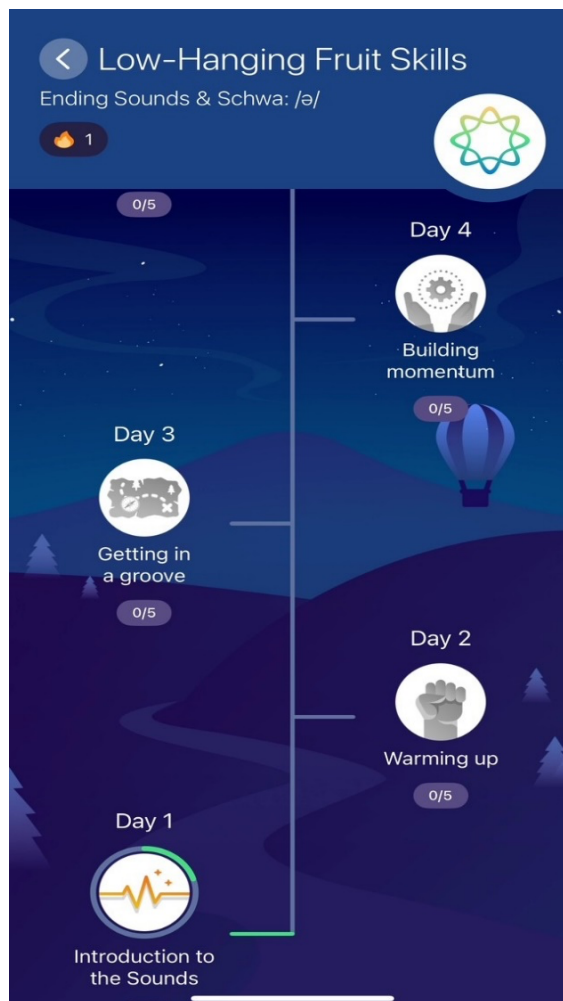
Teacher Dashboard: App Use Analytics



Planning the Evaluation of Tool Use

In order to help my students to use the app, I provided an orientation on the first day of class by helping them download, log into (with special codes given to me by the software company), and navigate the app. For this orientation, I displayed an instructional video provided to me by ELSA Speak. Then, as a homework assignment, I required students to complete the diagnostic test and begin their first few minutes of practice.

The diagnostic test takes around 20 minutes to complete and it gives a general evaluation of one’s pronunciation (see Figure 2) and then gives learners a daily practice schedule based on their results (see Figure 3). These essential steps were also displayed on the course LMS in the form of “how-to” pdf documents and videos. Students were expected to complete pronunciation practice homework by the end of the first week of class, until the end of the last week of class, totaling 16 weeks (400-1600 minutes) of practice (see Table 1 as an example of the first two weeks of class - the homework for weeks 2-16 is the same).

Figure 2*Diagnostic Test Results***Figure 3***Plan of Practice***Table 1***Pronunciation App Homework Model 1: First Two Weeks Sample Schedule*

Week	Pronunciation App Homework	Points	Due
1	Download app Sign in with given code Take diagnostic test Complete 25-100 minutes of practice	10	Sunday 11:59 PM
2	Complete 25-100 minutes of practice	10	Sunday 11:59 PM

Note. All weeks after Week 2 include the same homework assignment as Week 2.

Sustaining Tool Use

After the semester was over, I wanted to continue using this app with my students in following semesters, making this tool a permanent part of the course curriculum. However, the free accounts and teacher dashboard provided to me by the software company had expired and they were unable to extend the time allotted to the pilot accounts. With this being the case, I consulted leadership in my department to inquire about allocating funds to purchase accounts for this software, paying for student accounts and a teacher dashboard. Unfortunately, my department was unable to allocate the necessary funds. Therefore, the only way I could integrate this tool into the ITA course curriculum was by requiring students to pay for their subscription accounts individually. Individual monthly or quarterly app subscriptions are fairly reasonable for students in our context (being \$20 USD per month or around \$50 USD per quarter), especially since students are not required to purchase a textbook for the course. Students can download the app, pay for a subscription model that suits their needs, and use the app at their leisure. However, with this model of use, a teacher dashboard is not included, as this feature is only available to institutions that pay the software company directly.

The lack of access to a teacher dashboard prompted me to think of alternative solutions for verifying student app use. Therefore, I developed a more sustainable model for app integration. This model still requires students to take the diagnostic test and spend 25-100 minutes per week practicing on the app; however, instead of the teacher verifying student app use via the teacher dashboard, students were required to take a screenshot of their app analytics for each week and upload the screenshot to the course LMS homework assignments for evaluation (see [Figure 4](#)). In addition to this step, I required students to respond to a reflection prompt (in the same assignment) that asked them to describe their progress and challenges with the app in 50-100 words (see [Table 2](#) and [Table 3](#)). Though this model requires extra steps from students, it has proven to be more sustainable as I have been able to use it repeatedly every semester for the past two academic years, without funding from my department.

Figure 4

Homework: Weekly App Use Analytics

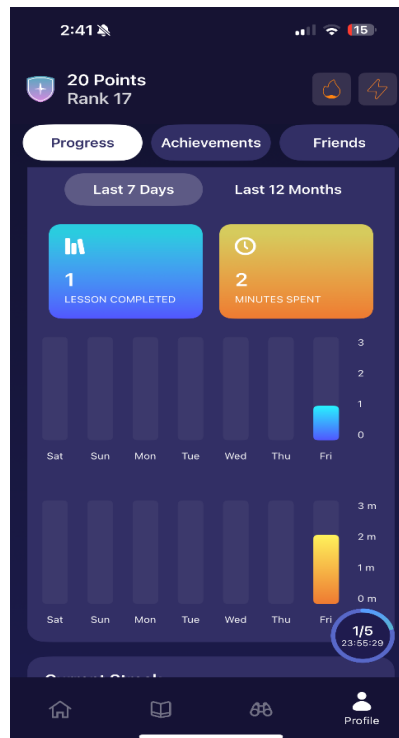


Table 2*Weekly Reflection Prompt Questions***Questions**

1. Was there anything frustrating about using ELSA? If so, please describe.
2. Describe the practice activities you have done this week.
3. Do you think you have improved your pronunciation this week? Explain.
4. How much time (total) did you spend on ELSA this week?
5. Describe your plan for using ELSA next week. State how many minutes per day you plan to use it and what sounds you will focus on.

Table 3*Pronunciation App Homework Model 2: Weeks 1 and 2*

Week	Pronunciation App Homework	Points	Due
1	Download app Sign in with given code Take diagnostic test Complete 25-100 minutes of practice Upload two screenshots: a screenshot of the diagnostic test results, and a screenshot of use analytics for Week 1	10	Sunday 11:59 PM
2	Complete 25-100 minutes of practice Upload a screenshot of use analytics for the week Respond to reflection prompt about app use in 50-100 words	10	Sunday 11:59 PM

Note. All weeks after Week 2 include the same homework assignment as Week 2.

Practical Benefits and Challenges**Benefits of Adaptation**

The benefits of having adopted this tool are numerous. First, from the students' perspective, the app gives each student personalized feedback and limitless practice in various aspects of pronunciation. In addition, the app fosters learner agency by providing students with several practice options and the freedom to

choose the practices they do and how much time they dedicate to each. For example, upon opening the app, students are presented with a list of options for types of practice such as Practice Daily Lessons, Improve Pronunciation, and Study by Topic. The Practice Daily Lessons include pronunciation practices that are recommended by ELSA, and include short instructional videos and practices for individual sounds as well as stress and intonation. The Improve Pronunciation option takes students directly to a list of individual sounds, consonants and vowels, as well as syllable stress and intonation practices. The Study by Topic option offers a list of topics so that students can practice pronunciation within a context of choice. Having these options promotes learner agency as students can choose to focus on an aspect of pronunciation that matters to them, with more or less guidance from the app.

For example, [Figure 5](#) and [Figure 7](#) show a practice activity for the consonant sound /ʃ/ and [Figure 6](#) shows a practice activity for two consonant sounds together (/s/ and /t/). In these practices, students see the word or sentence with the target sound, and they are prompted to record themselves articulating the sound. Students have the option of listening to the target sound before and after they record themselves, and by clicking on the snail icon, they can listen to a slower example. Upon recording themselves, immediate feedback is given by the app (as shown in [Figure 5](#), [Figure 6](#), and [Figure 7](#)). When students receive a score of anything less than “excellent” they are prompted to try again. The app is adaptive – it provides students with more practice exercises for sounds or stress and intonation patterns according to how they perform on the practice exercises. However, students do have the option to exit a practice and open another if they become frustrated or bored. For students, it was as if they had their own pronunciation coach – those who enjoyed using the app often used it for more than 20 minutes per day, and a few even continued to subscribe to the app after the semester was over.

From a teacher’s perspective, having this app as part of the course curriculum relieved me of the pressure and time it takes to search through various pronunciation textbooks or online resources for pronunciation activities and homework assignments. In addition, I found it to be particularly helpful in my specific instructional context because the student population is represented by various L1s and different levels of exposure to spoken English, resulting in varying pronunciation needs. The diversity of L1s represented in my classroom makes it challenging for me to identify all pronunciation needs of the entire student population and give each student the practice and feedback they require. Integrating the use of ELSA Speak into the curriculum addressed this particular pain point due to its ability to recognize individual learner pronunciation needs and provide practice and feedback accordingly.

Practical Challenges

Though this tool has proven to be helpful for students and teachers, it does present a few challenges. Even though students had the option to set the dashboard to their L1, not all languages were represented equally. For example, Mandarin was not available, and many ITA students were L1 Mandarin speakers. Although it is true that ITA students are generally advanced users of English, having the option to read pronunciation feedback in their L1 may reduce the cognitive load and facilitate understanding. Furthermore, even if students are able to view feedback in their L1, this does not guarantee comprehension due to the feedback given by the app being fairly technical. For instance, in the feedback, there are references to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and it often uses register-specific terminology (phonetics and phonology) that may be unknown to non-linguists – which makes the feedback difficult for students to understand, regardless of the language chosen for the dashboard. In the case of this particular ITA Training course, students usually understand the feedback that references the IPA because they learn about the IPA during the first and second week of the course. Nonetheless, having knowledge of the IPA does not guarantee understanding of feedback, though it may help.

In addition to the more complex feedback not being entirely comprehensible (i.e., a linguistic explanation

of error and how to correct it – see [Figure 5](#), [Figure 6](#), and [Figure 7](#)), the simple feedback (e.g., Excellent, Almost Correct, Try Again) given in practice activities was not consistently accurate. Students would often approach me before or after class to inquire about the feedback they were getting from the app; they could not understand why, after correcting their articulation of the sound through various attempts, they were unable to score as “Excellent.” Of course, it is possible for students to practice relentlessly and not improve; however, after listening to students record themselves on the app and seeing the feedback they received, I realized that the app did not consistently identify pronunciation improvements – it simply did not detect improvement. I attribute this inconsistency to the quality of the ASR software and the AI.

Last, as mentioned in the previous section (Sustaining Tool Use), ELSA Speak does have a subscription fee. The price of a quarterly subscription to the app is comparable to the price of a textbook (\$25-\$40 USD), however, it is possible that future students may not be willing or able to pay the subscription fee. Though I have yet to encounter a student who has expressed financial hardship or refuses to pay, this issue could arise in the future and I would need to address it by seeking funding from my department or the app company itself.

Figure 5

Pronunciation Feedback: Excellent

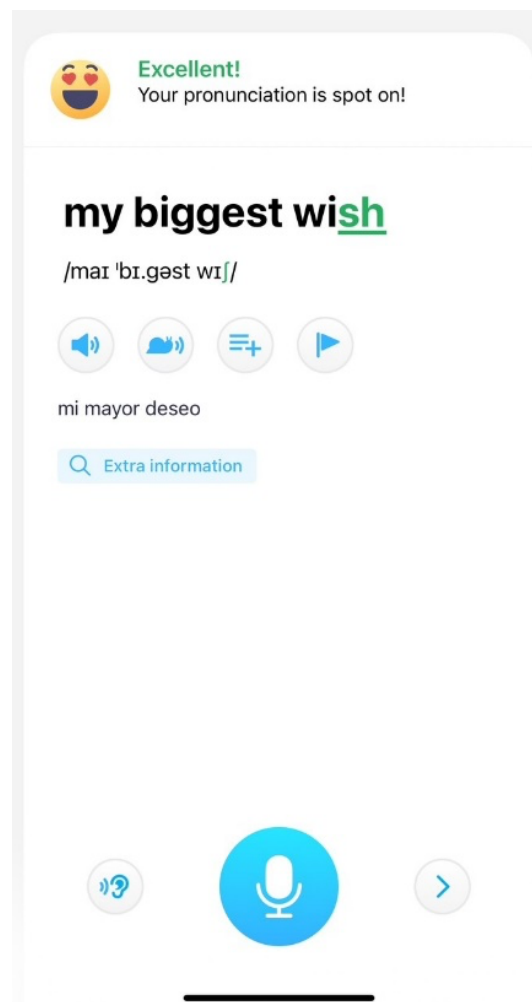
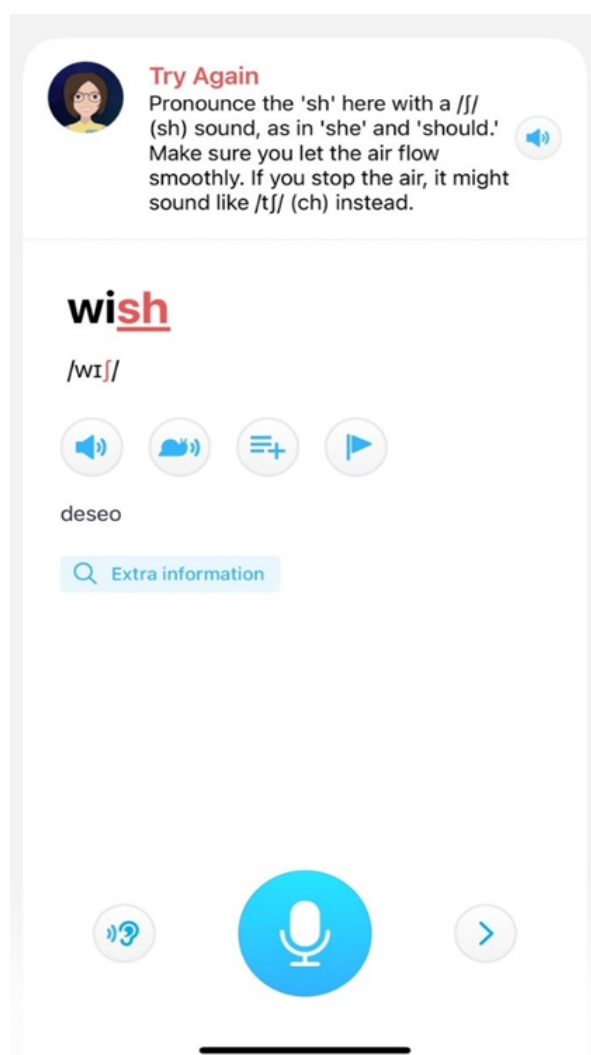


Figure 6

Figure 7

Pronunciation Feedback: Almost Correct*Pronunciation Feedback: Try Again***Addressing the Challenges**

One way I addressed these challenges was by insisting that students come to my office hours or speak to me before class for questions about the app and the feedback it gives. Typically, a few students would come to my office hours occasionally, while most preferred to ask me questions about the feedback before or after class. Likewise, in the Pronunciation App Homework Model 2 (see [Table 3](#)) I included a weekly written reflection about app use, which gave me insight into what types of challenges students face with the app so I could address them individually or in class. Another reason for requiring a weekly reflection response was also to increase the probability that students were using the app; as shown in [Figure 4](#), the dates of use are not visible, so there is no guarantee that students are not uploading the same screenshot repeatedly.

Last, in the ITA course, there are always a few students who have very intelligible speech and do not need to practice pronunciation. In theory, students of this profile should not be in the class, but for whatever reason, they did not get a passing score on the oral proficiency exam and must enroll in the class. Therefore, these students do not benefit much from using the app and become frustrated by having to use it. Not all students benefit from the app and there is always great variation in pronunciation abilities

within a single ITA course. For this reason, I made sure to give students some flexibility in how much time they are required to spend on the app (ranging from 5-20 minutes per day, 5 days per week). Also, I allowed flexibility in the practice activities so that they can follow the app's recommendations or simply scroll through practices they think are helpful.

Lessons Learned

Ultimately, when planning the implementation of a new tool such as the app discussed above, it is important to consider the institutional constraints that come with adapting the tool long-term, and the quality of the feedback the tool provides. First, I recommend contacting the software company that created the tool to request a virtual meeting with a sales representative so that they can demonstrate all of the tool's features, answer questions, and discuss the possibility of a free pilot. While many companies do give free pilots, keep in mind that these are normally short-term. If the pilot goes well and continued use is desired, then teachers should formally propose the tool integration to their institutional leadership, or they can request that students buy the tool independently. When having the initial meeting with the sales representative, teachers should inquire about the cost structure the software company offers to schools so that the long-term cost of using tool is not a surprise. If desired, teachers could invite institutional leadership to these meetings or conversations. This is a reasonable idea because the institution may have policies about security review for technological tools, or budgeting for tool integration – knowledge that may be out of scope for teachers.

Second, I recommend that teachers access the tool as a student-user and document all of the steps needed for onboarding and continued use. Understanding the student-user experience with the tool is key to understanding the tool's capabilities and limitations, as well as providing instruction on how to use it. Gaining student-user experience with the tool helps teachers anticipate potential issues in the onboarding and continued use phases; if potential obstacles for use are identified, they can be mitigated prior to student onboarding. For example, while experiencing onboarding as a student-user, the teacher may discover that the user interface is not as intuitive as expected, and some features of the tool may not be easily identified. In the case of ELSA, the location of the diagnostic test was not obvious and required three clicks to access. While exploring the app as a student-user, I foresaw this as an obstacle to onboarding and thus added these steps to the onboarding instructions. Having clear onboarding instructions gave me clarity and confidence when introducing the tool to my students.

Though I used ELSA Speak in the context of an ITA Training course for international students at a US university, a tool such as ELSA Speak could be used in various other ESL teaching and learning contexts. For example, ELSA Speak could be particularly useful in NNEST contexts when the teacher is unsure of their own English pronunciation or simply wants to provide students with a reliable pronunciation model to follow. Likewise, ELSA Speak could be integrated into adult ESL education courses in community college contexts. Learners in this context may have personal and professional goals that pronunciation practice will help them achieve. In addition, asynchronous practice opportunities are ideal for working adults who have busy schedules and limited free time.

Overall, there are various technological tools to choose from and selecting the right one can seem overwhelming at times. My recommendation is for teachers to first identify what problems need to be solved in their course – identify what it is that students are lacking and how using this technological tool could bridge a gap or support more efficient, individualized learning. Teachers may want to consider the following question: What can the tool do that the teacher cannot? For example, I chose to pilot this pronunciation app because it could do things that I, as a human teacher, could not do – such as give each student unlimited practice and immediate feedback on their unique pronunciation needs. Hence, the tool did not replace me as the teacher; instead, it supported the instructional goals of the course by helping students practice what they were learning in class. Ultimately, when choosing a tool, the goal is to harness the affordances of the tool by turning it into a well-integrated complement to the existing course content and instruction.

References

- Baker, & Murphy, J. (2011). Knowledge base of pronunciation teaching: Staking out the territory. *TESL Canada Journal*, 28(2), 29–50. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v28i2.1071>
- Chen, L., Zhang, R., & Liu, C. (2014). Listening strategy use and influential factors in Web-based computer assisted language learning. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 30, 207–219. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12041>
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2005). Second language accent and pronunciation teaching: A research-based approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 379–397. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588486>
- Douglas Fir Group (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *Modern Language Journal* 100(Supplement 2016), 19–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12301>
- ELSA Corp. (2025). ELSA Speak: English pronunciation coach (Version 7.5.2) [Mobile app]. Apple App Store. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/elsa-speak-english-learning/id1083804886>
- Garcia, C., Nickolai, D., & Jones, L. (2020). Traditional versus ASR-based pronunciation instruction: An empirical study. *CALICO Journal*, 37(3), 213–232. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.40379>
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next: Why global English may mean the end of “English as a foreign language.”* British Council.
- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford University Press.
- Lee, J., Jang, J., & Plonsky, L. (2015). The effectiveness of second language pronunciation instruction: A meta-analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 36(3), 345–366. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amu040>
- Levis, & Grant, L. (2003). Integrating pronunciation into ESL/EFL classrooms. *TESOL Journal*, 12(2), 13–19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1949-3533.2003.tb00125.x>
- Liakin, D., Cardoso, W., & Liakina, N. (2014). Learning L2 pronunciation with a mobile speech recognizer: French /y/. *CALICO Journal*, 32(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v32i1.25962>
- McCrocklin, S. (2019). Learners’ feedback regarding ASR-based dictation practice for pronunciation learning. *CALICO Journal*, 36(2), 119–137. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.34738>
- Tejedor-Garcia, C., Escudero-Mancebo, D., Camara-Arenas, E., Gonzalez-Ferreras, C., & Cardenoso-Payo, V. (2020). Assessing pronunciation improvement in students of English using a controlled computer-assisted pronunciation tool. *IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies*, 13(2), 269–282. <https://doi.org/10.1109/tlt.2020.2980261>
- Tseng, W.-T., Chen, S., Wang, S.-P., Cheng, H.-F., Yang, P.-S., & Gao, X. A. (2022). The effects of MALL on L2 pronunciation learning: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 60(5), 1220–1252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07356331211058662>

About the Author

Emilia Gracia, PhD in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics is the Head of Fluent Futures Lab at Arizona State University, Global Launch, where she trains International Teaching Assistants and conducts research in technology and language learning. Her research interests include Virtual Reality Assisted Language Learning (VRALL), L2 Pronunciation, and L2 Pragmatics.

E-mail: Emilia.Gracia@asu.edu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1169-3351>