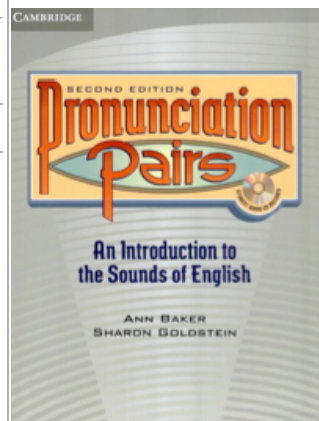


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<b>Pronunciation Pairs (2<sup>nd</sup> edition): An Introduction to the Sounds of English</b>		
<b>Author:</b>	Ann Baker & Sharon Goldstein	
<b>Publisher:</b>	Cambridge University Press (2009)	
<b>Component</b>	<b>ISBN</b>	<b>Price</b>
Student's Book with Audio CD	9780521678087	\$27.00 U.S.
Teacher's Manual	9780521678094	\$28.00 U.S.



Despite teachers' increased interest in pronunciation in recent years, pronunciation materials for learners and teachers are still limited. In addition, many general ESL teacher texts show only minimal attention to pronunciation, if any. Such lack of attention to pronunciation teaching has resulted in inadequate knowledge about how to integrate appropriate pronunciation instruction into ESL/EFL classrooms (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Baker and Goldstein's *Pronunciation Pairs: An Introduction to the Sounds of English* provides a useful resource to balance this current trend. It is designed to help students, particularly high beginning to intermediate students, recognize and produce the sounds of North American English. It covers vowels and consonant sounds of the language, as well as suprasegmental features of connected speech. At the same time, it offers a variety of exercises and activities, from very controlled minimal pair and listening discrimination tasks to dialogs, games, puzzles, and guided conversations. This book is the second edition built upon the first version published in 1990. The differences between the two editions are the added features of the second including updated practice tasks, improved illustrations, a class audio program, and an online practice and reference guide. The second edition consists of four components: student's book, classroom audio program, teacher's manual, and free website (<http://www.cambridge.org/pp/studnet>).

One of the most attractive characteristics about the book is its flexible structure. The book can be taught in whatever order the teacher or self-taught student desires; one can alternate between the vowel and consonants units, or simply focus on the sections

that address students' particular pronunciation difficulties. Moreover, it can be used in the classroom, language lab, or for individual study. The book consists of 50 units, with the first half devoted to vowel sounds, and the second to consonants. Each of the units can be readily adapted to suit an array of language classes, and to work in conjunction with a variety of supplemental materials. There are also eight review units.

The general format of the individual units typically begins with visual illustrations of the mouth and point-by-point directions on how to form the sound, followed by word pairs with accompanying illustrations. From there, one moves to a sound recognition test that focuses on the preceding word pairs, followed by a short vocabulary list containing the target sound, then a brief dialogue that incorporates a high concentration of the sound in question. The final portions of the unit contain a short description of a suprasegmental feature (stress, rhythm, and intonation), practice activities that include one or more interactive speaking tasks (e.g., role plays, discussions, games), a spelling section that identifies the basic spelling patterns typically associated with the sound, and a section called "common expressions" that consists of everyday phrases and sentences featuring the sound being studied. Interspersed throughout are short lessons relating to suprasegmentals.

The accompanying CD for the student edition contains selected examples from the complete class audio program which has to be purchased separately. In the student edition, dialogues are available for listening with one conversation featured per unit. Those dialogues are performed by the three professional voice actors and delivered at a relatively slow rate, which may be particularly beneficial to beginning students. In the final portions of the book, albeit somewhat limitedly, elements of natural speech are presented in the sample dialogue such as *didya* or *gonna*. However, students' ample practice listening to and repeating the sounds of English is available mostly through the full audio program. Suggestively, the teacher can elect to purchase the full version and use it in class. That is, he or she can create an in-class assignment where the students can practice the sections as part of a group exercise.

Another positive trait of the book is that it keeps with contemporary findings relating to effective pronunciation techniques. For example, in Unit 1 and 2, Baker and Goldstein offer clear directions for making the sound of /i/ and /I/ (e.g., *beat* vs. *bit*). ESL learners sometimes experience pedagogical misdirection when they are taught the English /i-/ /I/ distinction (Wang & Munro, 2004). While North American English speakers distinguish between /i/ and /I/ primarily on the basis of vowel quality rather than length (Hillenbrand & Clark, 2000), learners of English from many L1 backgrounds tend to perceive /i/ as a long vowel and /I/ as a short vowel with little or no difference in quality (Bohn, 1995). In the book, Baker and Goldstein well balance these findings and describe the distinction between /i/ and /I/ both from vowel length and from the vowel quality.

Issues of content that are worth highlighting include a reasonable vocabulary load, even though the words chosen are perhaps somewhat simplistic for intermediate

students. There are also opportunities for review at the end of each unit, as well as a cumulative self-test every few units. Furthermore, the text uses typographical cues to show how suprasegmental features are produced. For example, the suprasegmental focus in Unit 1 is on stressed syllables. The resulting explanation and accompanying visual cue is that “stressed syllable sounds are **louder** and **slower** than unstressed syllables”. Finally, the spelling component is noteworthy in that it illustrates how English sounds can be spelled in a variety of ways, thus helping to clear up the inevitable confusion with the differences in English sounds and spelling.

One more advantage of this edition is the inclusion of a free website. The layout of the website is simple in design and easy to navigate. Although geared more towards the teacher, it can certainly be of equal benefit to the student as well. One can reference the website for additional resources, including free, downloadable worksheets (<http://www.cambridge.org/us/esl/pronunciationpairs/support/worksheets.html>) for listening and speaking practice. There is one worksheet and accompanying answer key for each of the 50 units, and is designed to be used in conjunction with the matching audio files (<http://www.cambridge.org/us/esl/pronunciationpairs/support/audio.html>). These audio files are similar in structure to the CD that comes with the student textbook. These online audio files are not limited to the dialogues, but cover all the online exercises. Other features of the website include a chart listing the sound symbols ([http://www.cambridge.org/us/esl/pronunciationpairs/support/sound\\_symbols.html](http://www.cambridge.org/us/esl/pronunciationpairs/support/sound_symbols.html)) used in both the written and online versions of the textbook, most of which are taken from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), albeit with some slight variation (e.g., /iy/ vs. /i:/). Examples of words that contain the key sounds are provided, as well as a column in which the student or teacher can note the equivalent sound symbols from other dictionaries. Perhaps one of the most helpful aspects of the website for the teacher is that it provides printable lists of common errors ([http://www.cambridge.org/us/esl/pronunciationpairs/support/likely\\_errors.html](http://www.cambridge.org/us/esl/pronunciationpairs/support/likely_errors.html)) that students from various first language backgrounds are likely to have. With examples drawn from twenty-four languages, the problems are broken down according to issues relating to vowels, consonants, and suprasegmental difficulties, before concluding with examples of student errors. A diagnostic test is also available in the teacher’s manual that can be used to help identify particular pronunciation difficulties.

Even though the book is a decent starting point for the practice of minimal pairs, there are a few drawbacks to be addressed. Most speech samples in the audio dialogues are delivered at a relatively slow rate of speech, which may not mirror the natural, connected speech of authentic, native speaker interaction. Moreover, they may not provide for a variety of dialects, opting instead for a regionally-neutral dialect. Elements of natural speech in the sample dialogue are also limited to some extent. In addition, the book does not advance far enough for review and mastery; as a result, learners may not generalize the associated skill beyond what is covered in the book. Equally important is that given that a considerable amount of focus is placed on listening skills, these listening exercises are comparatively lacking in both authentic examples and contextualized materials. Consequently, students may lose interest in the subject topics. In a similar vein, though some attempt at variety is made amongst

the four communicative modes, the tasks are largely similar throughout, with a strong emphasis on rhyming, and, as a result, are likely to become repetitive.

In terms of language-level and age-related appropriateness, some of the features might be challenging for beginning students, and are best reserved for intermediate learners only. For example, Unit 2 requires a fairly extensive knowledge of how to form various types of questions. This might be appropriate with intermediate students, but may be difficult for beginning-level students who are still learning basic sentence structures. Other features that may be problematic for lower-level students include the spelling exercises, which require students to come up with words that have the sound in question, with the added restriction being that the new words conform to the specified spelling variation of that given sound. Finally, despite the claim that the textbook can work equally well with beginning and intermediate students, the units become progressively more challenging and detailed, regardless of the sound being studied. While a pick-and-choose technique is feasible for upper-level students, beginning learners might find the latter half of the book rather demanding. This could be especially problematic for those whose pronunciation difficulties happen to occur in the final portions of the book. As such, the teacher may need to make adjustments for ability when considering which part of the book to work on.

In sum, *Pronunciation Pairs* is certainly a reasonable starting point for pronunciation teaching and learning and becomes a useful resource to ESL/EFL students and teachers. As described before, it can be used in the classroom, in a language lab, or for self-study to help students improve the sounds of North American English. However, this book may not be a stand-alone textbook, if special attention is to be given to suprasegmental features, as these sections of the textbook are somewhat lacking in depth, and would need to be augmented by additional instruction. A textbook that focuses almost exclusively on contrasting sounds may inevitably be constrained in the types of instruction and exercises it can provide. Therefore, the book can be best used in conjunction with other, more comprehensive textbooks—particularly for an exclusive speaking and pronunciation class.

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**Okim Kang**  
**Northern Arizona University**  
**Okim.Kang@nau.edu**

**Jeremy Burch**  
**Northern Arizona University**  
**sotalpfs@yahoo.com**

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