


Youghlish

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Title	Youghlish 
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Contact Information	Website: https://youghlish.com/ Email: admin@youghlish.com
Type of Product	Video pronunciation dictionary
Minimum Hardware Requirement	An internet-accessible device (computer, tablet, smartphone)
Software Requirements	Any internet browser (e.g., Google Chrome, Safari, Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer)
Price	Free

Introduction

Pronunciation is a skill often neglected in both second language (L2) classrooms and in second language acquisition (SLA) research, typically due to a lack of formal teacher training on how to pedagogically address pronunciation issues (Cox, Henrichsen, Tanner, & McMurray, 2019; Derwing & Munro, 2005). Furthermore, as common pronunciation teaching methods depend largely on the teacher for providing models and feedback for pronunciation, non-native teachers in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts often feel unprepared to address pronunciation issues (Levis, 2007). In response to this issue, the use of computer-based technologies, such as automatic speech recognition (ASR), have been found to foster opportunities for practicing L2 pronunciation and receiving feedback outside the classroom. Such technologies may thus reduce dependence on the teacher and subsequently contribute to learner autonomy (McCrocklin, 2016). Computer-assisted pronunciation teaching (CAPT) can be individualized for each learner and can also provide frequent and repetitive opportunities for listening practice (Levis, 2007). The use of technology and web content as a means for providing exposure to authentic and unlimited target language input is well-established as beneficial for second language acquisition (Chun, 2016); therefore, it is also possible that authentic, web-sourced spoken language content can aid in L2 pronunciation development.

In response to a lack of teacher training for pronunciation and the subsequent lack of pronunciation teaching in L2 English language classrooms, Cox et al. (2019) outline the

development of a useful website to help teachers address this knowledge gap: *The English Pronunciation Guide: ESL Teachers' Guide to Pronunciation Teaching Using Online Resources* (<https://englishpronunciationguide.weebly.com/>). The site brings together existing pronunciation teaching videos from the web in order to provide guidance on addressing both segmental (consonants and vowel sounds) and suprasegmental (stress, rhythm, and intonation) pronunciation features. However, since the guide is intended only for teacher training, complementary classroom resources are needed for teachers seeking authentic pronunciation samples to help implement the pedagogical methods acquired from the *English Pronunciation Guide*.

One site developed to meet the need for authentic pronunciation input is YouGlish, a video pronunciation dictionary that allows language learners to quickly and easily access a multitude of YouTube-sourced pronunciation samples. The site claims to have over 30 million videos in its database with the primary objective of offering users “fast, unbiased answers about how languages are spoken by real people and in context” (Barhen, 2019). Target users of YouGlish are language learners seeking authentic pronunciation input in various real-world contexts. While the site was originally developed for English, the newest version also includes video pronunciation samples of French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, and Chinese. Given the scope of this journal, this review will be limited to a description and evaluation of the site’s applications for English language learning and teaching.

Description

On the front page of YouGlish, a search bar is located at the top (Figure 1). Users type the word or phrase they wish to hear and can then select whether to hear video pronunciation samples in American, British, or Australian English accents.

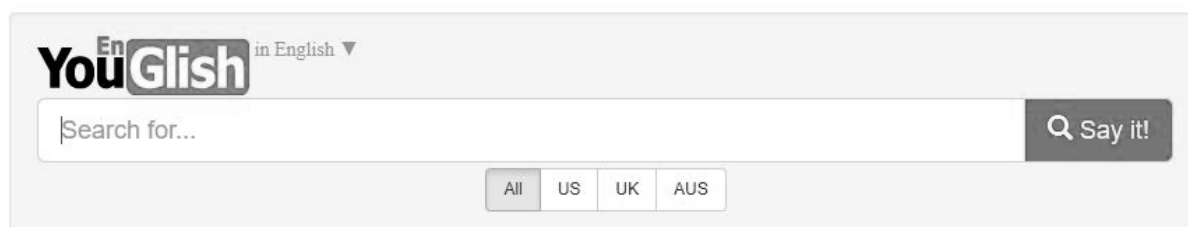


Figure 1. YouGlish search bar.

After searching for the desired word or phrase, a list of videos containing that search term (either single words or phrases) appear beneath the search bar, followed by a video pane with a title, time, and sharing options; the title links to the original video on YouTube (see Figure 2 below). Each result in the list of matching video samples automatically begins to play a few seconds before the search term is spoken and continues until the user skips to the next video.

Captions appear below the video during playback with the search term highlighted. Users can toggle the speed of the video playback between normal, slower, or faster speeds by using the controls in the bottom left-hand corner of the video (see Figure 2 below). Additional controls below the video pane include: two front/back arrows to toggle between videos in the playlist;

a rewind button that rewinds the video five seconds at a time; a replay button that restarts the video at the search term; and a play/pause button. Links below the caption bar provide further options. ‘Feedback’ allows users to send comments directly to the site administrator and creator, Dan Barhen. ‘Share’ allows users to copy the YouGlish video link or directly share it to Facebook or Gmail. ‘Save’ allows users to save the video to their personal list of YouGlish content and ‘YouTube’ opens the video in a new tab on YouTube.

How to pronounce **butternut** in English (20 out of 106):

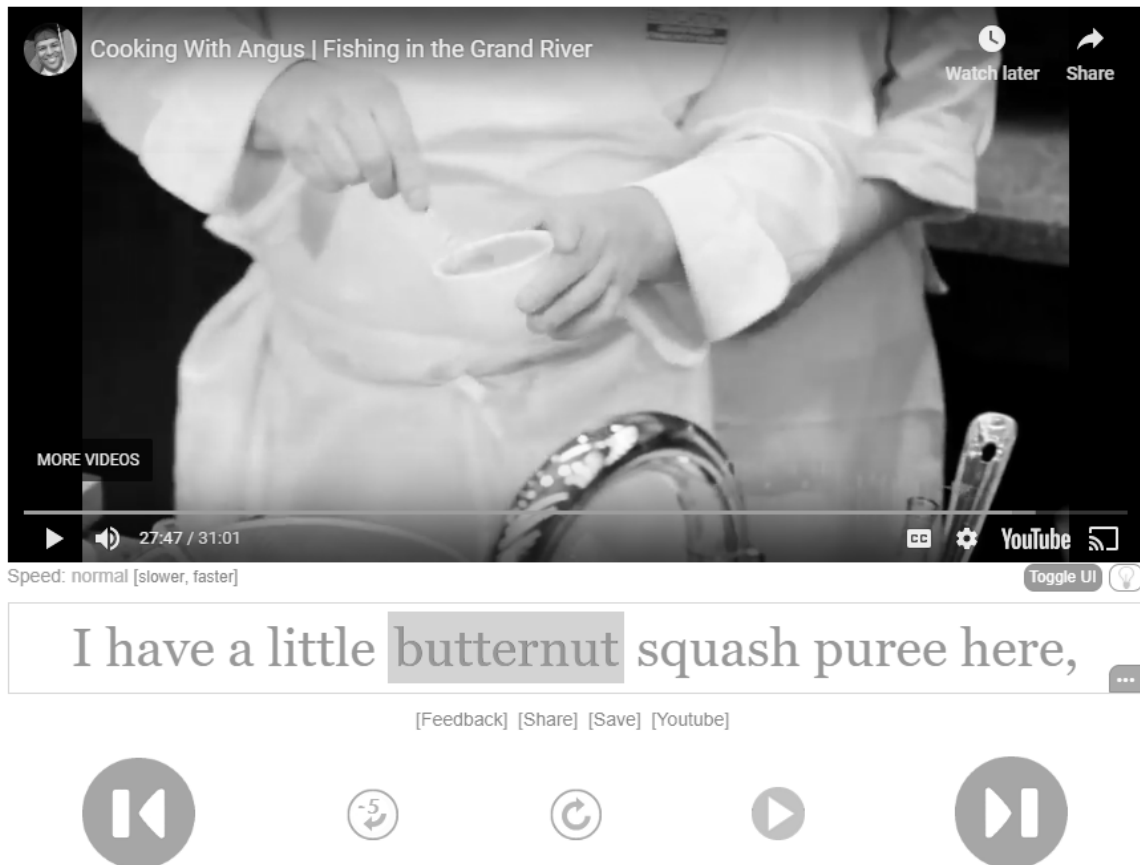


Figure 2. YouGlish video pronunciation dictionary search results for ‘butternut’.

After the video pane, additional pronunciation resources appear below the video pane. First, a word bank of ‘Nearby words,’ or words with similar word-initial orthographic, but not phonological, segments to the searched word, appears below the video pane; for example, nearby words for ‘butter’ include ‘butler’ and ‘butcher’ (Figure 3). Below comes a resource section labeled ‘Phonetic,’ providing both IPA spellings and a syllabic breakdown of the search term in question. The Phonetic resource section includes another bank of words with sound similarities to the word which seem to be selected based on word-initial and word-final segmental similarities, as well as similar syllable structures; for example, ‘better’ and ‘putter’ are populated for ‘butter’ (Figure 3). Each entry in the word banks is a hyperlink to a new YouGlish search of that word.

Nearby words:

You may want to improve your pronunciation of "butter" by saying one of the nearby words below:

but button buttons butler butterfly butterflies butcher butch butchers buttocks buttery butchered
buttoned butternut butchering buttermilk bute buts butte butting butress buttered butyl buttonhole
butted buttresses buttercream

Phonetic:

When you begin to speak English, it's essential to get used to the common sounds of the language, and the best way to do this is to check out the phonetics. Below is the UK transcription for **'butter'**:

- **Modern IPA:** bʌtə
- **Traditional IPA:** 'bʌtə
- **2 syllables:** "BUT" + "uh"

Test your pronunciation on words that have sound similarities with **'butter'**:

bitter batter beater better bettor biter buster butler buttered butters buttery putter betray bidder
bittern bitters bader balter banter barter bator

Figure 3. Nearby words and Phonetic word banks for additional pronunciation practice of 'butter'.

Below the word banks is a section of general pronunciation tips including a list of ideas and strategies for further practice (Figure 4). This list does not change with subsequent searches, except that new search terms are inserted into the same body of text with each new query.

Tips to improve your english pronunciation:

Here are 4 tips that should help you perfect your pronunciation of **'butternut'**:

- **Break 'butternut' down into sounds:** say it out loud and exaggerate the sounds until you can consistently produce them.
- **Record yourself** saying 'butternut' in full sentences, then watch yourself and listen. You'll be able to mark your mistakes quite easily.
- **Look up tutorials on Youtube** on how to pronounce 'butternut'.
- **Focus on one accent:** mixing multiple accents can get really confusing especially for beginners, so pick one accent (US or UK) and stick to it.

To further improve English pronunciation, we suggest you do the following:

- **work on word/sentence reduction:** in some countries, reducing words and sentences can be seen as informal but in the United States, it's completely normal and part of everyday conversation (eg: what are you going to do this week end → what you gonna do this week end). Click gonna and wanna for more examples.
- **work on your intonation:** stress, rhythm and intonation patterns are not easy to master in English but they are crucial to make others understand what you say. It's what expresses the mood, attitude and emotion. Check out Youtube, it has countless videos related to this subject.
- **Subscribe to 1 or more English teaching channels on Youtube:** it's free and it covers the core topics of the English language. Check out Rachel's English and English With Jennifer to name just a few.

Figure 4. General tips for pronunciation practice.

Account creation allows users to access additional features of YouGlish, including a section where they can maintain a personal database of previous searches and video samples accessed through the site. After login, users can navigate to the section named ‘My content’ and select the ‘My tracks’ tab, where they are given the option to save their favorite video clips for future study alongside the original search term (Figure 5). The blue play button next to each video loads the YouGlish video pane directly into the same window, below each entry in the list.

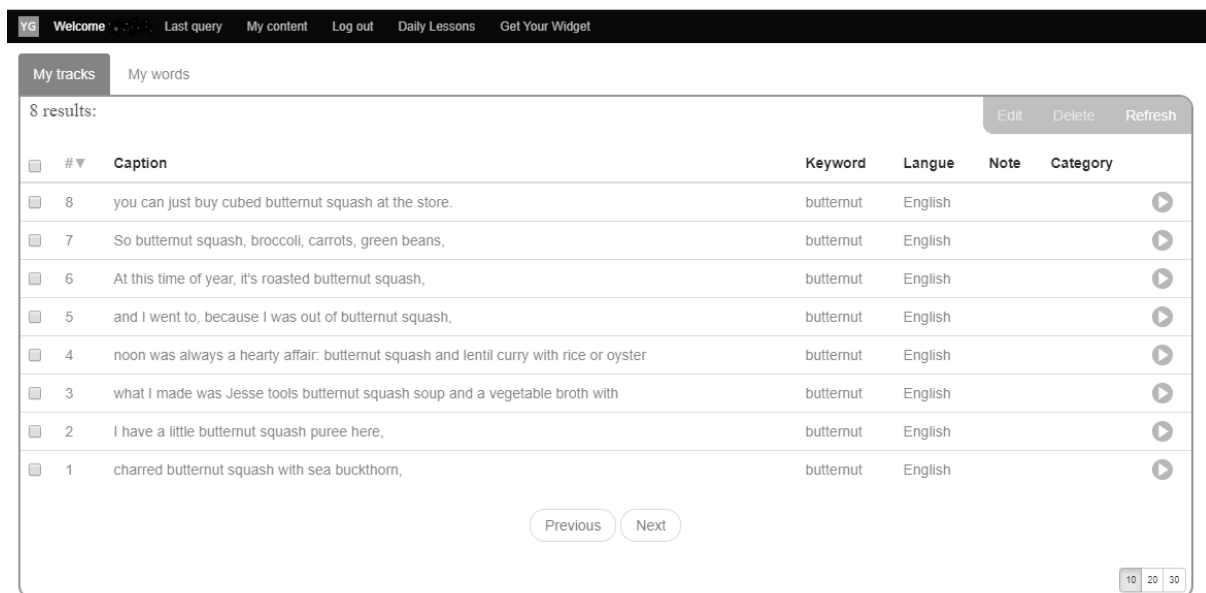


Figure 5. ‘My tracks’ personalized user database.

Under ‘My words’, users can view previously saved words or phrases, and add or delete additional words. When users add search words to this list, the site instantly populates a short definition, followed by the same blue play button that loads the YouGlish video pane directly below. Users can also edit each entry and add their own information under ‘Note’ and ‘Category’ (Figure 6).

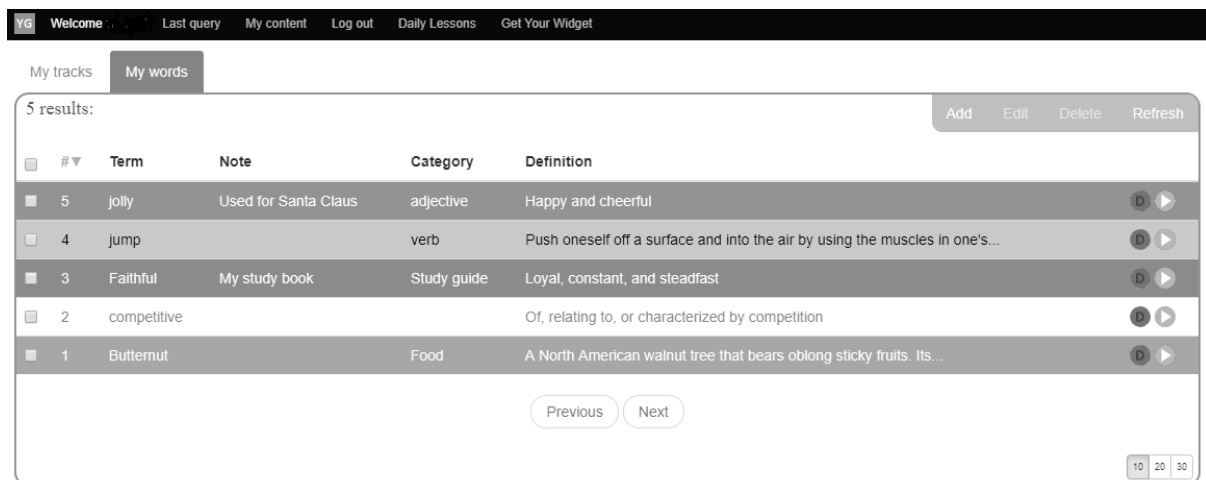


Figure 6. ‘My words’ tab of saved words, notes, and definitions.

Clicking on the green ‘D’ button provides users with even more vocabulary learning resources, divided into four sections: ‘Nouns’ gives multiple definitions of the word; ‘Synonyms’ provides synonyms; ‘From the Web’ provides web-sourced definitions of the word, each with a link to the original source; and ‘Usage Examples’ provides a list of web-sourced sentences containing the highlighted word and a corresponding source link (Figures 7 and 8).

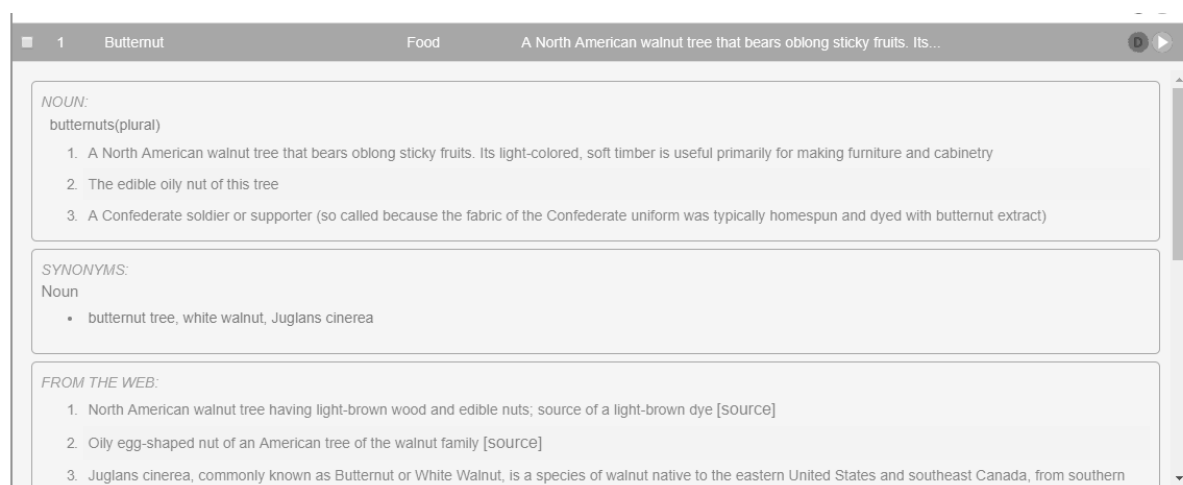


Figure 7. Additional definitions and synonyms under the ‘My words’ tab.

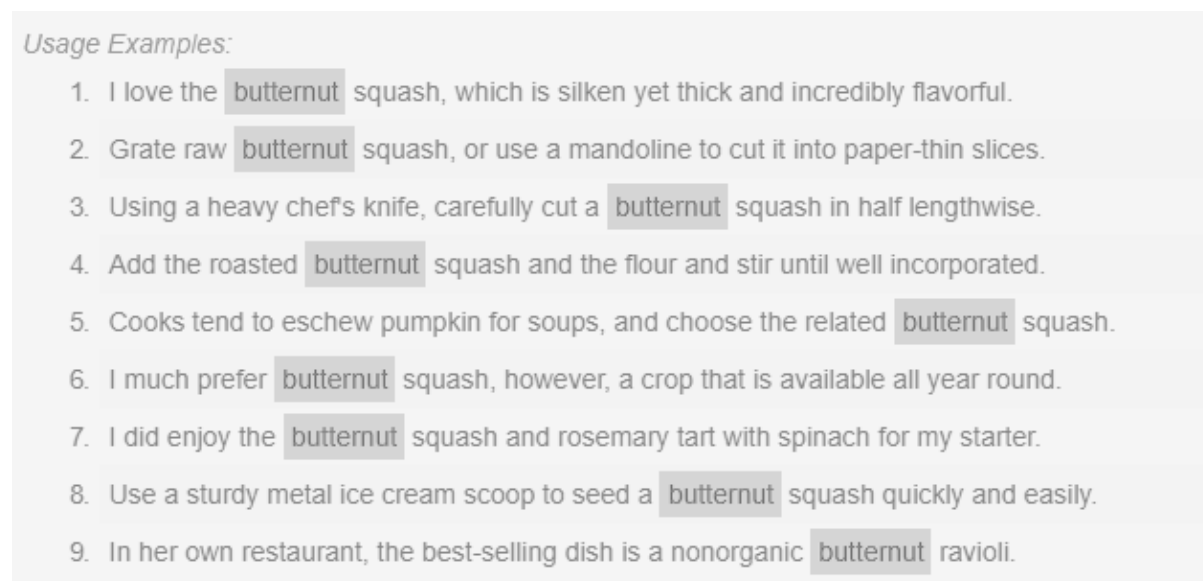


Figure 8. Usage Examples of the search term under the ‘My words’ tab.

YouGlish also offers several advanced search options, outlined on the ‘About’ page. Users can narrow their searches by word class (noun, verb, adjective, or adverb), phrase form (e.g. interrogative or exclamatory), topic, or any mixture of these three options, combining each option with a search term by using a hashtag. For example, users wishing to find spoken examples of the word ‘philanthropy’ in the context of Bill Gates could combine the two elements by searching ‘philanthropy #billgates.’ Figure 9 shows one result of this search.

How to pronounce **philanthropy** in English, #tag: *billgates* (3 out of 48):



Figure 9. YouGlish search of the word ‘philanthropy’ in a ‘Bill Gates’ context.

Evaluation

YouGlish is a video pronunciation dictionary that provides language learners authentic pronunciation input sourced from real-world communicative contexts as found on YouTube. The site is easily navigable and the extensive supporting practice resources offer users a variety of spoken and written input that can be individualized according to specific needs. The video content that appears in YouGlish searches has a notably consistent production quality, and many of the video samples come from TED talks, television shows, media interviews, and other professionally produced sources.

While YouGlish does not provide any functionality for corrective feedback on L2 pronunciation production, as with other CAPT technologies such as ASR tools, its value lies in the extensive range of authentic input that users can quickly and easily generate to aid in the development of their perception of L2 speech sounds. According to Flege’s Speech Learning Model, learners may initially have trouble distinguishing between similar L1 and L2

sounds, but improved perception of L2 sounds gradually results in more accurate production of those sounds (Flege, 1995). YouGlish can provide extensive exposure to authentic speech samples, and thus may enable learners to improve both their L2 perception and subsequent L2 production over time. This access to authentic pronunciation input may be especially valuable in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms where naturalistic language exposure is often minimal and learners lack opportunities for authentic L2 perception development. Furthermore, with the specialized search functions, teachers can also use YouGlish to integrate pronunciation input and practice into targeted lessons on topics such as cooking, sports, science, celebrities, or political figures. YouGlish could also be utilized in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms by targeting vocabulary and social contexts related to medical and business occupations. Users can manipulate their queries with the advanced search features to find uses of specialized target vocabulary in context; learners and teachers alike can shape pronunciation input so that YouGlish provides meaning-focused samples corresponding to specific social contexts and individual interests.

Second language acquisition researchers have come to recognize the need for instruction that addresses both segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). Considering the rapid playback of single words or short phrases, YouGlish may not be ideal for learning segmentals, especially for lower proficiency learners who may need to slow down or replay videos multiple times. However, since YouGlish does provide contextualized input, learners may have greater opportunities for exposure to suprasegmental features than can be provided in traditional classrooms or by computerized audio dictionaries. Since the teaching of suprasegmental pronunciation features involves focusing on multiple words over the course of an utterance instead of single segments within one word, YouGlish may support the acquisition of suprasegmental features of English pronunciation. Activities such as shadowing (imitating a speech model) and mirroring (imitating bodily movements in addition to speech) of video pronunciation samples from YouGlish may help learners acquire L2 prosodic features (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

One of the strongest features of YouGlish for L2 pronunciation practice is the extent to which language learners control the input provided by the site, thus contributing to learner autonomy. CAPT technologies have been shown to increase learner autonomy for pronunciation practice, providing students an anxiety-free approach to experimenting with L2 pronunciation and offering teachers a way to provide opportunities for pronunciation practice outside of class time (McCrocklin, 2016). Moyer (2015) views learner autonomy for L2 phonological development partially as a function of *choice*, in that autonomous learners make a conscious choice of *how* they want to sound in the L2; they then engage in self-regulated learning strategies, exercising control over the content and type of language learning tasks they encounter. To foster learner autonomy, she recommends that teachers “expose students to a range of different voices” in the L2 in order to “enhance their perception of new categories and sound patterns”, discuss different kinds of regional and social L2 variation, and raise awareness of how pronunciation can be meaningful in communication (Moyer, 2015, p. 406). Furthermore, phonetics research has demonstrated that the manipulation of audio input, by enhancing the saliency of certain acoustic features, can improve learners’ L2 perception (Derwing & Munro, 2015). With proper training from teachers on how to utilize

the tool and carefully targeted homework assignments, YouGlish can support all of these functions towards the development of learner autonomy.

Furthermore, since YouGlish functions as a video corpus, by searching a body of electronic texts (in video form) and providing numerous samples of authentic language use, the site may also be useful for language teachers implementing data-driven learning approaches, in which learners are trained to utilize computer software to investigate target language items in context to inductively form their own conclusions about the L2 (Boulton, 2017). Data-driven learning has been shown to result in greater cognitive processing and longer retention of L2 features; however, there are relatively few spoken language corpora with authentic conversation data (Boulton, 2017). YouGlish is a tool that meets this need and can thus support data-driven pronunciation instruction.

Conclusion

Due to its simple, straightforward interface and wide range of pronunciation resources for language learners, teachers and students will find YouGlish invaluable for improving L2 pronunciation. The site offers affordances for the development of L2 speech perception and L2 suprasegmental features while simultaneously allowing users the freedom to manipulate pronunciation input according to specific needs and interests, which may in turn encourage learner autonomy. Language teachers may find YouGlish useful for integrating pronunciation practice with topical lessons, and the site can also contribute to ESP and data-driven learning approaches. In combination with adequate teacher training for pronunciation pedagogy, YouGlish is a technology that can positively benefit language learners' second language pronunciation development.

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About the reviewer

Michol Miller is currently completing her master's studies in TESL and Applied Linguistics at Oklahoma State University. She has numerous years of experience as a TOEFL writing rater and English teaching experience in Brazil at the university level. Her primary research interests include computer-assisted language learning, corpus linguistics, multilingual language teaching, and cognitive approaches to second language acquisition.

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