

Five Pronunciation Games for Brazil

Mark Hancock with Ricardo Sili

I presented a workshop called 'Pronunciation Games for Brazil' with Ricardo Sili at the 13th BRAZ-TESOL National Convention. This article is a written up selection of the activities from that presentation, including the games which seem to be of most specific relevance to Brazilian teachers and learners.

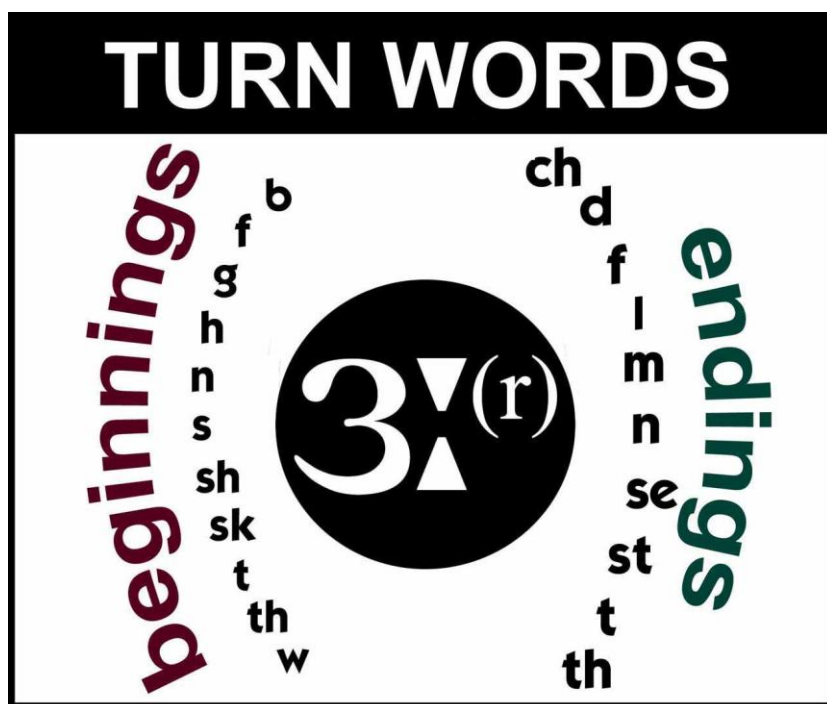
Of all the aspects of language that we cover in English Language Teaching, pronunciation is probably the one which *most* needs tailoring to the needs of each specific L1. Sadly, no published books of pronunciation material can cater for all the languages in the world, and few cater even for any specific L1. This is a need that Ricardo and I have tried to address, first at the convention and now in this article.

Game 1: Turn Words

English has many more vowel sounds than vowel letters. So how do English speakers manage to spell all of those vowel sounds? The answer is: with great difficulty. There are all kinds of curious spellings which look nothing like the way they sound. And very often, the very same sound is spelt completely differently. Look at this short rhyme:

What a curious creature
Is the English teacher

Who would have guessed that *ture* in *creature* could sound exactly the same as *cher* in *teacher*? Brazilian learners often try to say English vowels as they are written, and this seriously distorts their pronunciation. We need to raise their awareness to the fact that the sound-spelling patterns are more complex in English than in Portuguese. The following game is designed for precisely this purpose. It is a competitive team game to raise student awareness of the middle vowel /ɜ:/ and its various spellings er, ear, ir, or, ur.



PROCEDURE

1. Write the word 'turn' on the blackboard. Drill the pronunciation. Focus on the vowel - it doesn't matter if they prefer to pronounce it the American way (with the /r/) or the British way (without the /r/).
2. Write 'word' on the blackboard. Drill the pronunciation. Point out that the vowel sound is the same - even though the vowel letter is different!
3. Give out (or project) TURN WORDS. Explain that the symbol in the middle represents the vowel sound in 'turn' and 'word'. Show how you can make words with this sound with one of the beginnings and one of the endings. For example, the beginning t with the ending n makes the word 'turn'.
4. Divide the class into two teams and explain the rules.
5. Teams take turns to make words. For each word they make, they must pronounce and spell the word. If they get it right, they win a point.
6. Your team can win an extra turn if they can make a word with the same beginning or ending as the previous team's word. For example, if Team A makes the word 'bird', team B can make the word 'burn' or 'heard' and then have another turn.

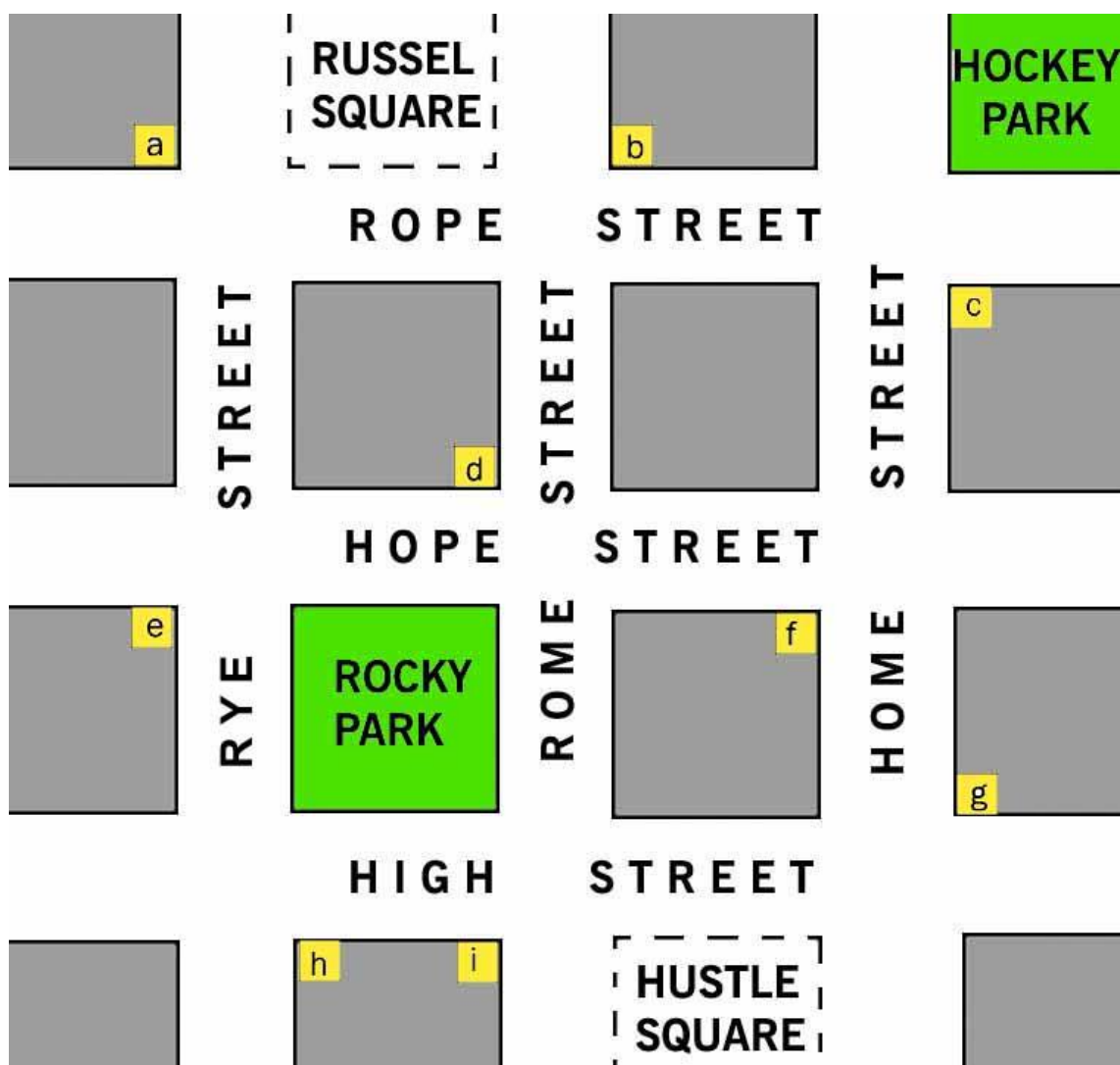
Answer key:

Here are possible words. There are other possibilities at higher levels.

*bird birth burn church dirt earth firm first girl heard hurt learn nurse search
shirt skirt surf third turn word work worse worst worth*

Game 2: Rome or Home?

Consonant sounds are strongly influenced by their position at the beginning, middle or end of a word. For example, the sound /l/ is different in the words *leaving* and *Brazil*. Native speakers of a language are very often unaware of these variations. The rules of consonant variation are different in Brazilian Portuguese and English, and Brazilian learners often wrongly transfer the rules from their L1. A clear example of this is the sound /r/. Many Brazilians pronounce the R at the beginning of a word like an English /h/, so that *Rio* sounds like *Hio*. They unwittingly transfer this to English, so that *red* sounds like *head*. The following game is intended to raise their awareness of this.



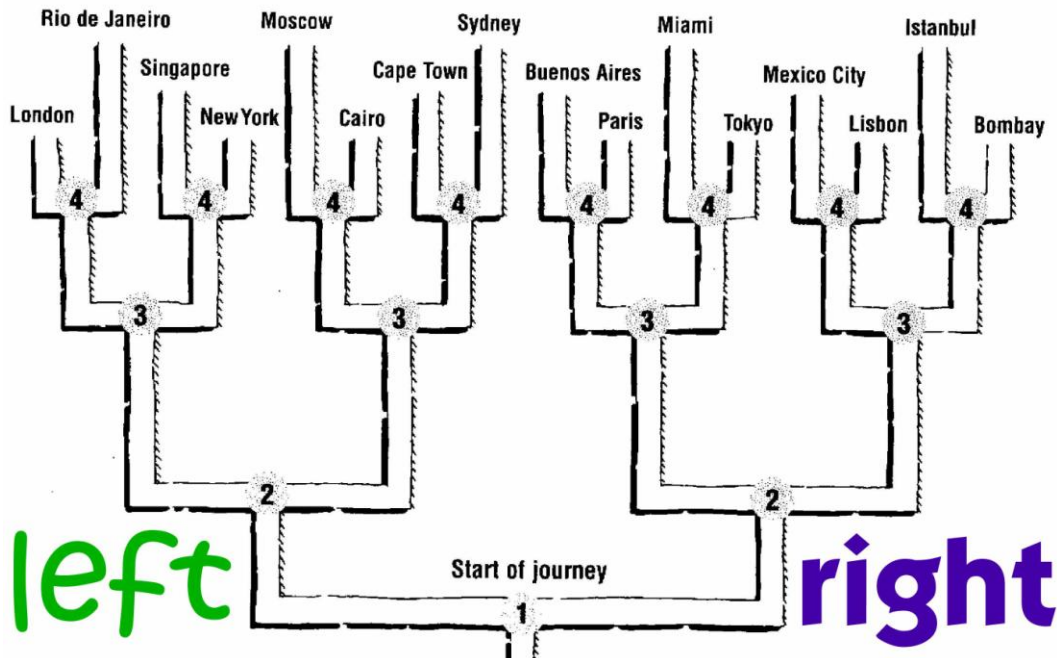
PROCEDURE

1. Give out the map. Notice that for each street, park and square on the map, there is another with a name which sounds exactly the same except for the r or h sound at the beginning.
2. Demonstrate the game by working with a volunteer student. Describe one of the places a - i on the map. For example: "It's on the corner of Hope Street and Rome Street. It's opposite Rocky Park". The student should be able to identify the place as d.
3. Put the students in pairs and ask them to take turns to describe the location of one of the places a-i on the map as you have just demonstrated. Warn them to be careful to pronounce the names beginning with R correctly, otherwise they will be naming a different street!

Game 3: Cough or Coffee?

For many Brazilian Portuguese speakers, certain unstressed final syllables are radically reduced to become almost silent. For example, the second syllable in *taxi* is barely

audible to a non-Brazilian listener. This is transferred to English, so *coffee* sounds a little like *cough*. To make matters worse, a very slight vowel is often added after a final consonant, so that *cough* sounds a little like *coffee*! Here's a game designed to focus attention on this problem.



COOK-cookie cop-copy cough-coffee dirt-dirty
 eight-eighty fog-foggy juice-juicy luck-lucky
 move-movie noise-noisy notes-notice part-party
 red-ready serves-service tax-taxi wind-windy

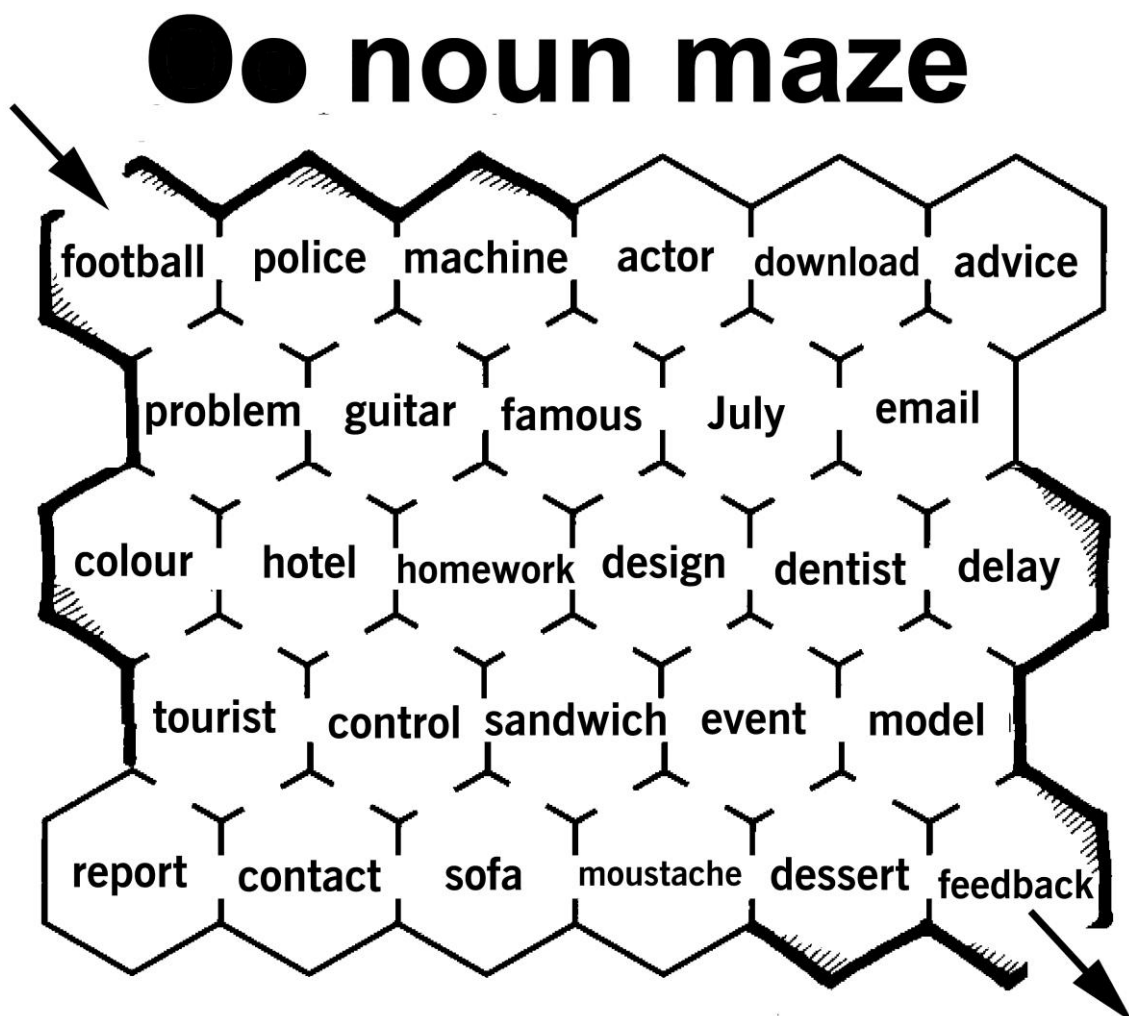
PROCEDURE

1. Give out or project the image.
2. Point out the pair cook-cookie at the bottom of the page. Explain that if they hear cook, they should turn left and if they hear cookie they should turn right. Now say 1. cook, 2. cook, 3. cookie, 4. cook and ask students which city they have reached (answer = Singapore).
3. Try a few more examples using other word pairs. You may use words from different pairs at each of the junctions 1-4, for example 1. cookie, 2. cop, 3. coffee, 4. dirty = Tokyo.
4. When students are completely familiar with the procedure, get one volunteer to say words from the word pairs. Advise the reader to make the difference between the left and right words very clear! You and the rest of the class should follow and identify the city. If anybody reaches the wrong destination, get them to work out where they went wrong. Was it because the reader didn't make the difference clearly enough?

5. Students can now work in pairs. They take turns to be reader and listener, guiding each other to one of the city destinations. Remind the readers to make the difference between the left and right words very clear, otherwise their partners will reach the wrong city!
6. Get them to change partners and do the activity again.

Game 4: Noun Maze

Wordstress placement is irregular in English, which is a cause of difficulty for learners the world over. There are some regularities, however. For example, nouns and adjectives of two syllables usually have the stress on the first. This is different in Portuguese, and so very often, cognates will have stress in a different place. For example, the word *sofa* has stress on the first syllable in English, while in Portuguese has stress on the second syllable. Brazilian learners have to learn this difference very early on. But the problem is that there are plenty of exceptions to the rule. For example, both the English and the Portuguese word *hotel* have the stress on the second syllable. But Brazilian learners often mistakenly put the stress on the first to make it sound more English. The following game is intended to focus on this area of confusion.



PROCEDURE

1. Say the English word *colour* and ask your students to give the Portuguese translation. Ask them to compare the pronunciation of the two words. Show how the English word has the stress pattern Oo, while the Portuguese has the pattern oO.
2. Give out or project the maze. Explain that they have to go through the maze of hexagons from top left to bottom right. They may only pass through a hexagon if the word in it has the stress pattern Oo.

Answer Key: the correct route is football-problem-colour-tourist-contact-sofa-sandwich-homework-famous-actor-download-email-dentist-model-feedback

Game 5: Sentence Search

In the pronunciation of sentences, English has the following pattern: content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and so on are stressed. Function words such as articles, prepositions, pronouns and so on are NOT stressed. Portuguese generally has the same pattern, but there are differences. In particular, pronouns may be stressed in Portuguese. For example, in the English phrase, *I like her*, *her* is not normally stressed. In the Portuguese phrase *Gosto dela*, *dela* IS stressed. If Brazilian learners transfer this to English as *I like HER*, it sounds as if they are trying to contrast *her* with someone else.

SENTENCE SEARCH

we	met	them	<i>I</i>	<i>he</i>
<i>I</i>	think	<i>he</i>	left	lost
bought	<i>she</i>	called	<i>him</i>	<i>his</i>
<i>you</i>	gave	<i>her</i>	<i>my</i>	keys
<i>your</i>	<i>him</i>	name	card	<i>us</i>
lunch	<i>her</i>	<i>I</i>	like	<i>her</i>
<i>I'll</i>	phone	<i>my</i>	mum	<i>my</i>

●●● x3
We met them.

●●●● x4

●●●●● x5

PROCEDURE

1. Give out the Sentence Search puzzle. Go through the circled example *I met them* with the class. Show that it has the first of the three stress patterns on the right

because *I* and *them* correspond to small circles and *met* corresponds to the big circle.

2. Now ask the students to find the remaining sentences, and make a note of them beneath their respective stress patterns. Point out that the sentences may be horizontal or vertical. Many of the words are used twice - once in a horizontal sentence and once in a vertical sentence. If there are two sentences in the same direction containing the same words, for example, He called; he called her and He called her name, students should circle the longest one.
3. Go through the answers with the class:
oOo - We met them, She called him; I like her
oOoO - I think he left; I'll phone my mum; He called her name; He lost his keys
oOooO - You gave her my keys; I bought you your lunch; She gave him her phone; I left him my card
4. Ask the students to look at the puzzle and say what kinds of words correspond to the small circles and what kinds of words correspond to the big circles (small circles = pronouns & possessive adjectives; big circles = verbs)

Mark Hancock has taught English since 1984 in Sudan, Turkey, Brazil, Britain and Spain. He has written many ELT books including *Pronunciation Games* (CUP 1995) and *English Pronunciation in Use Intermediate* (CUP 2012). He is co-founder of the ELT website <http://hancockmcdonald.com>, which includes articles and materials on pronunciation and many other topics.

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