Playing with the sounds of English

It is common for speakers to play with the sounds of the language. Read these sentences from newspapers and magazines. Notice that the blue phrases contain words which sound similar. They contain rhymes: the final vowel or vowel + consonant sounds are the same or similar-sounding, e.g. sign and time.

It’s very strange, but did you know
Shoe will never rhyme with toe?
And foot will never sound like boot;
Boot’s like suit and flute and fruit.
Foot’s like put and feet’s like seat;
Great’s like eight but not like eat.

Appearance is very important in the fashion business. According to company director Martha Friedl, ‘You have to dress for success.’

Fernando goes from zero to hero after scoring a last-minute goal in the European championship.

‘On this island, nothing happens in a hurry,’ says Jamie, ‘You just have to relax and go with the flow.’

In the age of the text message, it is perhaps a sign of the times that many teenagers can no longer write with a pen.

Listen to this poem. Notice the pronunciation of the blue words.

A

shoe /ʃuː/
foot /fʊt/
great /greɪt/
work /wɜːk/
beard /bɪəd/

B
toe /təʊ/
boot /buːt/
seat /siːt/
fork /fɔːk/
heard /hɜːd/

C

know /nəʊ/
suit /səʊt/   
feet /fɪt/   
walk /wɔːk/   

Note: The rhyming words above may not rhyme in all accents. For more on accent variation, see Units 56–60.
Exercises

1.1 Underline the phrases containing rhymes in these sentences from newspapers and magazines.

EXAMPLE We bring you the latest news and views from the sporting world.

1. Fancy flying to the Mediterranean for a weekend of fun in the sun?

2. An extremely low tide has left many boats high and dry on the beach.

3. ‘You don’t get to the top by doing nothing,’ says manager Bob Clarke, ‘Hard work is the name of the game.’

4. ‘I’m a man with a plan,’ Mitchell tells Democratic Party conference.

5. Back in the 1970s, school classrooms were all chalk and talk. Nowadays, kids expect their lessons to be entertaining.

6. Motorists have been advised to steer clear of Junction 15 during the roadworks.

1.2 Read the poem below and write the words from the box in the gaps. Listen, check and repeat.

do doll go goal hour magazine rude sounds slower wood

It’s very strange, but did you know

... doesn’t rhyme with clean;

... will never rhyme with roll;

... doesn’t rhyme with flower

And four will never sound like .

Ocean doesn’t rhyme with ;

’s like green and .

will never rhyme with ;

Roll’s like hole and also .

5 .

6 .

5 .

7 .

8 .

9 .

1.3 Which word does not rhyme with the others? Underline it. The phonemic symbols will help you. Listen and check your answers.

EXAMPLE hair here there where /hæə hɪə ðeə weə/

1. car star far war /kɑː staː faː wɔː/

2. slow cow go know /sləʊ caʊ goʊ nɔʊ/

3. nose grows does goes /nəʊz grəʊz dʌz ɡəʊz/

4. clear near bear hear /kliə nɪə beə hɪə/

5. really early nearly clearly /ˈrɛlɪ ˈɛəri ˈnɛri ˈkliəli/  

6. close choose lose shoes /kloʊz tʃuːz lʊz fjuːz/

7. above glove love move /əˈbaʊv ɡlov lʌv muːv/

1.4 Find groups of rhyming words or letter names in these pictures. There are three words or letter names in each group.

EXAMPLE boot – suit – fruit

... ... ...

... ... ...

... ... ...

... ... ...

... ... ...

... ... ...

... ... ...

... ... ...

... ... ...
2.1 Plane, plan

The vowel sounds /eɪ/ and /æ/

When you say the letters of the alphabet, A has the long vowel sound /eɪ/. You hear this sound in the word plane. But the letter A is also pronounced as the short vowel sound /æ/, as in the word plan.

A.4 Listen to the sound /eɪ/ on its own. Look at the mouth diagram to see how to make this long vowel sound.

Listen to the target sound /eɪ/ in the words below and compare it with the words on each side.

- meat, mate
- come, came
- white, wait
- buy, bay

Listen and repeat these examples of the target sound.

play, played, plate
grey, grade, great
aim, age, eight

B.5 Listen to the sound /æ/. Look at the mouth diagram to see how to make this short vowel sound.

Listen to the target sound /æ/ in the words and compare it with the words on each side.

- mud, mad
- sing, sang
- pen, pan
- hot, hat

Listen and repeat these examples of the target sound.

bank, bag, back
hand, cash, catch
ham, has, hat

The plane was delayed so we waited and played.

A man in a black hat with a bag of cash in his hand

C. Spelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/eɪ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/æ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accent variation

SE: /æː/ or /æ/ ⇒ Unit 57.
NZ: /æː/ or /æ/ ⇒ Unit 57.
Exercises

2.1 Write the words for these things in the correct part of the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>words with /eɪ/</th>
<th>words with /æ/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cake</td>
<td>apple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Look at the blue words or syllables in the dialogue. Do they contain 1 /eɪ/ or 2 /æ/ ? Write 1 or 2 in the gap after each word. Then listen and check your answers.

Kate: What are your plans, for the holiday, Jack?
Jack: I’m off to Spain with Jane.
Kate: Sounds great! How are you getting there?
Jack: Train to Manchester and the plane to Malaga. And you? What are you doing?
Kate: No plans. I’m a bit short of cash actually, so I’m staying here.
Jack: Oh. In that case, Kate, can you do me a favour?
Kate: What?
Jack: Can you go to my flat and feed the cat?
It’s just for a few days.
Kate: When do you get back?
Jack: I’m back on Saturday.
Kate: Well, okay then.

Follow-up: Play the recording again. Pause and repeat after each line.

2.3 Listen and underline the word you hear. If you find any of these difficult, go to Section E4 Sound pairs for further practice.

1 Man or men? Did you see the man / men? (⇒ Sound pair 1)
2 Cap or cup? Have you seen my cap / cup? (⇒ Sound pair 2)
3 Hat or heart? She put her hand on her hat / heart. (⇒ Sound pair 3)
4 Pain or pen? I’ve got a pain / pen in my hand. (⇒ Sound pair 4)
5 Stay or stare? There’s no reason to stay / stare. (⇒ Sound pair 5)

Follow-up: Record yourself saying the sentences in 2.3, choosing one of the two words each time. Make a note of which words you say. Then listen to your recording in about two weeks. Is it clear which words you said?
A

3.2

When you say the alphabet, the letters B and P have the sounds /biː/ and /piː/.

In words, they have the consonant sounds /b/ and /p/.

Look at the mouth diagram to see how to make these sounds.
Listen to the sounds /b/ and /p/.

The mouth is in the same position for both sounds, but:

- in /b/ there is voice from the throat, whereas in /p/ there is no voice from the throat
- when /p/ is at the start of a word, there is a small explosion of air when the lips open. With /b/ this does not happen.

A8

Now listen to the sound /b/ on its own.

Listen to the target sound /b/ in the words below and compare it with the words on each side.

Listen and repeat these examples of the target sound.

bought bike broke
rubber about able
job web tube

A9

Listen to the sound /p/ on its own.

Listen to the target sound /p/ in the words below and compare it with the words on each side.

Listen and repeat these examples of the target sound.

post park price
open happen spring
shop help jump

Spelling

frequently notes

/b/ B (job), BB (rubber) B is sometimes silent (comb).

/p/ P (open), PP (happen) PH is pronounced /f/ (phone). P is sometimes silent (psychology).
Exercises

3.1 **A10** Listen and read this dialogue. What are the three misunderstandings?
Complete the table.

Mel: Oh, hello, Stef – back from the shops already? Is it still raining?
Stef: Yeah, it’s pouring!
Mel: Boring? If you’re bored, get yourself a hobby!
Stef: No, I said pouring, with a P.
Mel: Oh, I see, pouring, right. Was there anything in the post box today?
Stef: Nothing interesting, just some bills.
Mel: Oh? I wonder who put pills in the post box!
Stef: Did you remember to buy a gift for Tom’s birthday?
Mel: Yes. Now I just need to wrap it.
Stef: Rabbit? What do you need a rabbit for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stef says:</th>
<th>Mel hears:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 pouring</td>
<td>boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow-up: Play the recording again. Pause and repeat after each line.

3.2 **A11** Read the joke and write the letter b or p in each gap. Listen and check your answers. Then practise saying the joke.

A baboon goes into a pet shop to buy peanuts and ..p..anas.
‘Sorry,’ says the sho. p. keeper, ‘This is a pet shop – we only sell food for .....ets.’
‘OK,’ says the baboon, ‘I’d like to .....uy food for my pet rabbit.’
‘What does your pet rabbit eat?’ asks the shopkeeper.
‘.....eanuts and bananas,’ re.....ies the .....aboos.

3.3 **A12** Listen. In one word in each group, the B or P is not pronounced. Underline the word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>double</th>
<th>doubt</th>
<th>Dublin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lamb</td>
<td>label</td>
<td>lab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crab</td>
<td>robbed</td>
<td>climb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cup</td>
<td>cupboard</td>
<td>copy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photo</td>
<td>potato</td>
<td>paper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recipe</td>
<td>repeat</td>
<td>receipt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possibly</td>
<td>psychology</td>
<td>special</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>combine</td>
<td>combing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 **A13** Listen and tick (√) the sentence you hear, A or B. If you find any of these difficult, go to Section E4 Sound pairs for further practice.

A   B
1 There’s a bear in that tree.   There’s a pear in that tree. (⇒ Sound pair 28)
2 He had the beach to himself.   He had the peach to himself. (⇒ Sound pair 28)
3 They burned it.                They’ve earned it. (⇒ Sound pair 29)
4 Say ‘boil’.                     Save oil. (⇒ Sound pair 29)
5 This is a nicer pear.          This is a nice affair. (⇒ Sound pair 30)
6 Would you like a copy?         Would you like a coffee? (⇒ Sound pair 30)

Follow-up: Record yourself saying the sentences in 3.4, choosing sentence A or B. Make a note of which sentence you say. Then listen to your recording in about two weeks. Is it clear which sentences you said?
Rice, rise
The consonant sounds /s/ and /z/

A14 When you say the alphabet, the letters C and S are pronounced /siː/ and /es/. Notice they both have the consonant sound /s/. But S is also often pronounced as the consonant sound /z/.

Listen to the sounds /s/ and /z/. Look at the mouth diagram to see how to make these consonant sounds. Notice that in the sound /s/, there is no voice from the throat. It sounds like the noise of a snake. In the sound /z/, there is voice from the throat. It sounds like the noise of a bee.

A15 Now listen to the sound /s/ on its own.

Listen to the target sound /s/ in the words below and compare it with the words on each side.

Then listen and repeat the examples of the target sound.

Examples
sad city science scream
glasses concert class six

Note: The vowel sound is shorter before /s/ than /z/, e.g. in place and plays. If you have difficulty making the difference, exaggerate the length of the vowel in plays. (For the pronunciation of -s endings such as plurals, see Unit 23.)

A16 Listen to the sound /z/ on its own.

Listen to the target sound /z/ in the words below and compare it with the words on each side.

Then listen and repeat the examples of the target sound.

Examples
Sue place breeze
zoo zero size
rice rise wise
scissors exact

A dozen pretty roses, a thousand busy bees

Spelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>frequently</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/s/</td>
<td>S (sad), SS (class), C (place)</td>
<td>/ks/ can be written X (six). S is not always pronounced /s/ (sugar, rise, plays).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/z/</td>
<td>Z (zero), S (nose)</td>
<td>/gz/ can be written X (exact). -SE at the end of a word is usually pronounced /zl/ (rise).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pronunciation may be connected to grammar: use /juːs/ = noun use /juːz/ = verb
close /ˈkləʊs/ = adjective close /ˈkləʊz/ = verb house /ˈhoʊs/ = noun house /ˈhoʊz/ = verb
Exercises

4.1 Look at the blue words in the story. Do they contain /s/ or /z/? Write s or z in the gap after each word. Listen and check your answers. Then practise saying the joke.

A woman was, z, taking a zebra, z, along the street ....... A police ...... officer stopped ...... her and said: 'The street is no place ......, for zebras, Madam. You should take it to the zoo ......!' 

'You're right, officer ......,' said the woman, 'I'll take it straight ...... there!' Later, the officer saw ......, the woman with the zebra again. 'I said you should take that zebra to the zoo!' he said ....... 

'Yes ......, we went, and it was great,' said the woman, 'Now he wants to go to the museum .......'

4.2 Find a route from Start to Finish. You may not pass a square if the word contains the sound /z/. You can move horizontally (→) or vertically (↑) only. Listen and check the words in the correct route.

4.3 Listen to the sentences. Look at the words in blue. Underline the words which contain the sound /s/ and circle the words which contain the sound /z/. Then listen again and repeat.

EXAMPLE You can have my tent. It's no use to me. I never use it.

1 I'm not going to advise you. You never take my advice. 
2 Your tooth is loose. You'll lose it if you're not careful. 
3 The shop's very close to home, and it doesn't close till late. 
4 I can't excuse people who drop litter. There's no excuse for it.

4.4 Listen and underline the word you hear. If you find any of these difficult, go to Section E Sound pairs for further practice.

1 Price or prize? I got a good price / prize for that painting. 
2 He sat or he's at? I don't know where he sat / he's at. 
3 Suit or shoot? They didn't suit / shoot him. 
4 Saved or shaved? I've saved / shaved a lot in the past few days. 
5 Sink or think? We didn't sink / think. 
6 Closed or clothed? They were closed / clothed for the cold weather.

Follow-up: Record yourself saying the sentences in 4.4, choosing one of the two options each time. Make a note of which words you say. Then listen to your recording in about two weeks. Is it clear which words you said?
5

Down town
The consonant sounds /d/ and /t/

A
A20 Listen to the sounds /d/ and /t/. Look at the mouth diagram to see how to make these consonant sounds. The mouth is in the same position for both sounds, but:

- in /d/ there is voice from the throat, whereas in /t/ there is no voice from the throat
- when /t/ is at the start of a word, there is a small explosion of air when the tongue moves. With /d/, this does not happen.

A21 Now listen to the sound /d/ on its own. Listen to the target sound /d/ in the words below and compare it with the words on each side.

town down town
wrote road wrote
they day they
page paid page

Listen and repeat these examples of the target sound.
dance daughter dream
sudden advice address
dad food mind

Note: The vowel sound is shorter before /t/ than /d/, for example in wrote and road. If you have difficulty making the difference, exaggerate the length of the vowel in road.

B

C
A22 Listen to the sound /t/ on its own. Listen to the target sound /t/ in the words below and compare it with the words on each side.
die tie die
hard heart hard
tree eat tree
each each

Listen and repeat these examples of the target sound.
taste Thomas train twelve
butter until hated
fruit worked toast

Accent variation SE / Am / C: /t/ or /d/; /t/ or /ʔ/ ⇒ Unit 58.

Note: In fast speech, many speakers drop the /d/ or /t/ when they come between two other consonant sounds. So facts /fæks/ sounds like fax /fæks/.

D

Spelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>frequently</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/d/</td>
<td>D (dog), DD (address)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/t/</td>
<td>T (tie), TT (butter)</td>
<td>(E)D past tense ending</td>
<td>TH (Thomas)</td>
<td>T can be silent (listen).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grapefruit tastes so bitter; toast and butter’s better.

David’s daughter didn’t dance, but David’s dad did.
Exercises

5.1 [A23] Complete the rhymes with words from the box. Then listen and check. The second time you listen, pause after each line and repeat it.

rude  said  late  head  fight  polite  food  wait

There was a young lady called Kate,
Who always got out of bed ..........late ......
The first thing she .......... 
When she lifted her .......... 
Was: 'I thought it was better to .......... .'

There was a young waiter called Dwight, 
Who didn’t like being .......... 
If you asked him for .......... , 
He was terribly .......... 
And invited you out for a .......... .

5.2 [A24] Listen and underline the word you hear in each pair.

1 build built
2 wide white
3 weighed weight
4 heard hurt
5 down town
6 dry try
7 send sent

5.3 [A25] Put the words from 5.2 into the sentences below. Then listen and repeat the sentences.

EXAMPLE Last year, Tom weighed more than Sam, but now they both have the same ....weight......

1 It wasn’t .......... in a day; it takes ages to .......... a cathedral like that.
2 When you’re out in the mountains, you have to .......... to stay .......... .
3 He .......... it to the wrong address, so he had to .......... another copy.
4 It .......... my ears when I .......... that noise.
5 The .......... sofa is too .......... to go through that door.
6 We went .......... the hill and into the .......... .

5.4 [A26] Listen and underline the word you hear. If you find any of these difficult, go to Section E4 Sound pairs for further practice.

1 Wider or whiter? Choose Dentocream for a wider / whiter smile! (⇒ Sound pair 34)
2 Dry or try? You have to dry / try it out. (⇒ Sound pair 34)
3 Breeding or breathing? These animals aren’t breeding / breathing! (⇒ Sound pairs 35)
4 Thought or taught? She thought / taught for a long time. (⇒ Sound pairs 35)
5 Aid or age? For us, aid / age is not important. (⇒ Sound pairs 36)
6 What or watch? What / Watch a game! (⇒ Sound pairs 36)

Follow-up: Record yourself saying the sentences in 5.4, choosing one of the two words each time. Make a note of which words you say. Then listen to your recording in about two weeks. Is it clear which words you said?