



香港城市大學  
City University of Hong Kong

## The use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for pronouncing the sounds of languages

**Project Number:** 6000775

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Wai Sum LEE

**Grant Type:** TDG

### **Abstract:**

The common way that students learn to pronounce the sounds of a foreign language is to imitate the sounds uttered by language teachers or native speakers of the language. A possible drawback with the practice is that students are in a way parroting without understanding how the sounds are articulated. This may result in (i) being unable to pronounce the words not previously heard and (ii) pronunciation that lacks precision and salience. Furthermore, language teachers in general are unable to effectively explain and correct the pronunciation errors made by students. They usually ask students to repeat after them, resorting to the less productive listen-and-repeat method rather than the more effective analyze-and-understand method. An effective way to help remedy the situation will be for students to acquire the knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet, commonly known as the IPA. Students will be able to pronounce the words in a second language whether or not previously heard by looking at the IPA transcription of the words, given that they know the phonetic value - articulatory and suprasegmental properties - embodied in the symbols of the transcription. Also, teachers can now explain technically the reasons for the pronunciation errors made by students and answer questions about the pronunciation of the sounds of a second language. The proposed project introduces the knowledge of the IPA to students and teachers with an aim to facilitate learning and teaching of the pronunciation of the sounds of foreign languages, in particular those taught at the CityU, namely Japanese, Korean, German, French, Spanish, Standard Mandarin and English.