

TEACHING ENGLISH IN KOREA

THE NEWSLETTER

THE
ASSOCIATION
OF ENGLISH
TEACHERS
IN KOREA

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한국 영어 교사회

December 1982

AETK recently received a letter from Alice H. Osman, Editor of the TESOL Newsletter. The letter transmitted a request for contributions for materials for a page devoted to the concerns of international ESL teachers, those who work in the field outside the United States and the other English-speaking countries. Such an international page would include announcements of regional/national conferences and workshops, reports from affiliates, short articles on the practical issues of teaching ESL outside the United States and of training ESL teachers and articles comparing the teaching philosophies of various countries. In addition, writers to the international page could ask questions such as these: this is my situation--can anyone in a similar situation recommend (books, etc.) or is anyone willing to come to my (affiliate, teacher's group, class of ESL trainee teachers) and give a mini-course on X, for expenses? AETK will support such an international page, but as Liz Hamp-Lyons, the writer of the request for materials and originator of the international page idea, wrote, "Now I'm addressing myself to those among you for whom such a page would be intended: if you don't write it, nobody will. ...you can generate a two-way information exchange if you will only contribute.... And an announcement, a short letter, a question, would take only a few minutes. You might begin by responding to some of the comments and suggestions in this letter." If you wish to begin such a two-way information exchange, send your correspondence to

Liz Hamp-Lyons
Institute of Applied Language Studies
University of Edinburgh
21 Hill Place
Edinburgh EH8 9DP
Scotland, UK

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The R/L Problem

(Moneta Prince has been teaching in Korea for sixteen years both in Taejon and in Seoul. She is a member of the Department of English at Soongjun University where she teaches phonetics and phonology. She holds a master's degree in linguistics from the University of Texas, Austin.)

In teaching pronunciation, it is important to concentrate on the problems that actually cause communication to break down. Perhaps no other pair of English phonemes--certainly among the consonants--causes as much confusion for Koreans as the r/l distinction. This article is intended to be practical help for the teacher of English and the learner as well in attacking this pair.

Before we discuss the r/l problem, though, perhaps it would be good to list some basic principles of teaching pronunciation:

1. Under normal circumstances, students cannot make the necessary distinctions between sounds until they can aurally discriminate between them: listening practice comes first.
2. Fellow students as peer models are easier to follow than the teacher. This is particularly true of vowels; men need lower voice models, women higher.
3. Pronunciation sessions are more effective if they are short (15 minutes at the most) and frequent.

The Korean language has one phoneme that sometimes sounds like an /l/ and sometimes an /r/ and occasionally a /d/ to English speakers. Psychologically to the Korean this is one sound; therefore, the r/l distinction in English does not seem real. It is like the situation of the traveler who enters a foreign country for the first time. The local currency does have value, s/he intellectually knows, but somehow it still seems like play money. Koreans know that the r/l difference is distinctive in English, but it is hard to really believe it. Thus students even make spelling errors: c-l-o-w-d for 'crowd' and c-r-o-u-d for 'cloud.' The r/l distinction is a psychological problem as much as it is a phonetic one.

The Korean sound is retroflexed when at the end of a breath group or before another consonant including another r/l. The tongue is curled back (Fig. 1). Between vowels it is a tap or flap: it makes a quick brush against the tooth ridge area and is somewhat retroflexed, particularly with back vowels.

To teach /l/, emphasis should be made on keeping the tongue flat, not retroflexed (Fig. 2). Compare Korean r/l and English /l/ with the students. English /l/ is very much like /t/ except instead of the whole opening between the teeth being blocked by the tongue, only the central part is blocked and air freely flows over the sides of the tongue. Practice t/l pairs (tea, lee; tame, lame) to illustrate this, emphasizing that the tongue must be pointed more sharply for /l/. Students

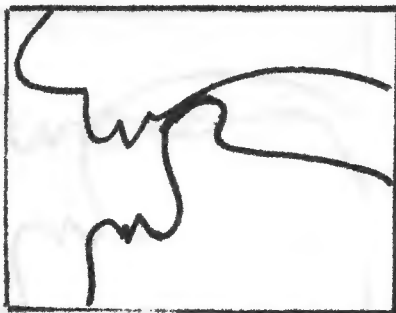




Figure 1




Figure 2

should be encouraged to watch themselves in a mirror because retroflexion is usually visible; they must not see the underside of their tongues. Even without the retroflexion, the sound may still not be correct because it is too long, almost as if there were a vowel in front of it. This should be pointed out. Never model an /l/ or an /r/ by itself. They should always be used in a word to prevent distortion.

After this /l/ is mastered, there is still another to be learned. The /l/ in Fig. 2 is only in syllable initial position. If the /l/ occurs after a vowel as the final part of the syllable, it becomes a "dark l" or velarized l. The back of the tongue humps up like it does for the vowel /u/ as in 'good' (Fig. 3). This does produce a "dark" sound. Examples of dark l are 'all,' 'bell,' 'pool,' 'building.' Often if the /l/ is followed by another consonant with no vowel following, just the vowel-like sound is made and the front of the tongue touches nothing; e.g., 'silk,' 'film,' 'melt,' 'help.' Even with the velarization, the front of the tongue still is not retroflexed. Comparison of Korean and English words is helpful: 'eel,' ; 'toll,' .

Among English speakers there are two ways of making the /r/ sound: the retroflexed way and the "bunched" way. Acoustically these are identical. Since Korean r/l is also retroflexed, one would assume it would be easy for Koreans to make the retroflexed English /r/. But this is not the case. Korean r/l involves actually touching the underside of the tongue to the roof of the mouth, but in English there is no such touching. My own experience has been that the "bunched r" is more effective because it feels totally different to the Korean speaker. This is illustrated in Fig. 4. Emphasize bunching of the tongue in the back of the mouth with outward pressure on the upper molars. The front of the tongue is cupped a little but not retroflexed. The tip of the tongue must not touch anything. The lips are slightly rounded. The actual position will change with the vowel, but the student does not have to know this.

Now we are ready for minimal pairs--pairs of words that are exactly alike except for one sound, in this case /r/ and /l/. Students must first listen to the difference. After they have acquired some ability to hear the difference, they are ready to attempt it themselves. Examples of pairs are red/led, low/row, rude/lewd. Many different vowels should be used.

As with /l/ this is only half the story. The final /r/ is much more complicated. It is most helpful to think of this sound as an r-colored /ə/ as in 'sir.' Every other vowel will have an off-glide into this basic sound: 'here' is /hiər/. This vowel is really the source of the problem. Many British dialects have no /r/ in this environment at all (except when followed by a vowel in the next word), but the Korean version of the British sound can still be unintelligible. The vowel /ə/ (or /ʌ/ in stressed positions) is considerably more forward in the mouth than the Korean vowel  which is most commonly substituted. The Korean vowel is extreme in its backness. It sounds somewhat like /ɔ/ (the vowel in 'bought') but is unrounded. Therefore Korean students cannot hear the difference between 'work' and 'walk' and 'fawn' and 'fern.'

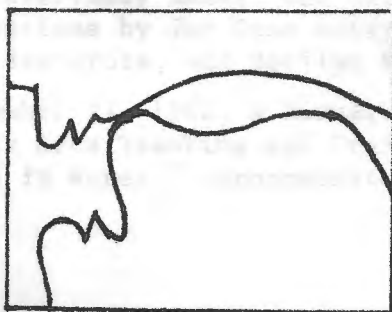


Figure 3

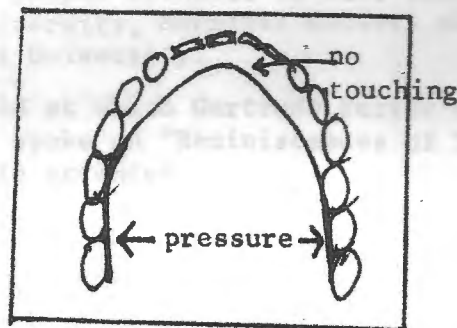


Figure 4

First the vowel /ə/ or /ʌ/ should be learned. Compare Korean and English words 'but' 뉘 ; 'up' 업 ; 'cut' 깎 'numb' 멍 . Very unscientific, impressionistic remarks like "Korean 어 is dark and heavy, English /ʌ/ is light" are amazingly effective. Then practice other words with this vowel. Sentences with assonance are helpful: "The bugs run up the duct," for example. Then do the same with the /ɔr/ sound. The tongue should be in the position to pronounce words beginning with /rʌ--/, e.g., 'rug.' Two of my favorite sentences are "Sir, it is certain the fur is dirty" and "The early bird earns the worm."

After the students become capable of making the /ɔr/, minimal pairs with final /l/ and /r/ (pool/poor, fill/fear) and final /ɔr/ and /ɔ/ (work/walk, d rn/dawn) may be used. Sentence frames using minimal pairs are even more effective but difficult sometimes to design, e.g., "You must work/walk on." and "These are pool/poor resources."

May this be of some help to you as you teach the light pronunciation of English!

Committee Actions

Co-ordinating Committee

At a meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee on November 29, 1982, the treasurer reported a bank balance of ₩ 516,000 and membership was reported at eighty-four. It was decided that 1983 membership fees remain the same as for 1982--₩ 10,000 for the year beginning January 1983. The treasurer also requested the chairmen of the program and publication committees to supply him with budgets for the coming new year. A special committee under the chairmanship of Prof. Chung Dong-su was formed to study the feasibility of AETK sponsoring a special conference with speakers possibly from abroad sometime during the fall of 1983. Other on-going business was also discussed.

Program Committee

On September 15, 1982, Dwight Strawn of Yonsei University and John Holstein of Sungkyunkwan University addressed the topic "Dealing with Large Classes." Dr. Strawn discussed the possibilities of engaging students in offering topics for class activities; Mr. Holstein offered suggestions for teaching writing. Sixty some people attended.

On October 20, 1982, Moneta Prince of Soongjun University and Edward Klein of Hawaii Pacific College led discussions on "Pronunciation Problems of Korean Students." The approximately sixty persons who attended split into two groups--one to hear Mrs. Prince's presentation and discuss it, the other to participate in a roundtable discussion.

On November 13, 1982, a Saturday afternoon workshop on the topic "Eradicating Errors Everybody Makes" was held. Some forty people attended to hear short presentations by Joe Gene Autry of Myongji University, Margaret Elliott of the Sogang Institute, and Marilyn Burney of Yonsei University.

On November 17, 1982, a dinner meeting was held at which Gertrude Ferrar of the Language Arts Teasting and Training institute spoke on "Reminiscences of Teaching English in Korea." Approximately twenty people attended.

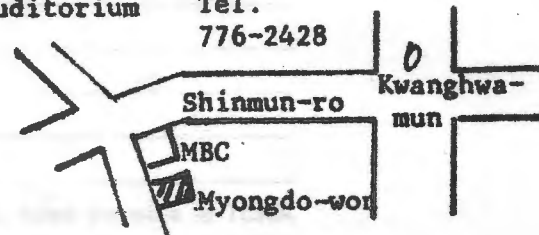
Future Meetings

December

Topic: Using Music in the Language Classroom
Susan Gaer, Foreign Language Institute, Yonsei University

Time:
December 15, 1982
7:30 p.m.

Place:
Myongdo-won Language Institute
Auditorium Tel.
776-2428



Other Announcements

The College English Teachers' Association announces

- a Winter Conference February 21, 1983: Submit an abstract of a paper you wish to present no later than January 10, 1983.
- the 25th volume of CETA's journal. Manuscripts should be received no later than December 15, 1982.

CETA
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Seoul 100
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한국영어교육학회
서울 중구 필동 3가 26
동국대학교 (100)

The University of Houston announces a Summer Institute in Discourse Analysis
July 25 to August 20, 1983. For more information write

Director
Language and Culture Center
English Department
University of Houston Central Campus
Houston, Texas 77004
U.S.A.

The Experiment in International Living is looking for qualified people to fill these positions in Indonesia or Thailand: ESL Co-ordinator, Cultural Orientation Teacher Supervisor, Cultural Orientation Co-ordinator, ESL Master Teacher. Degrees in ESL or related fields suited to the job and previous work with South East Asians are required. Salaries range from \$ 12,500 to \$ 15,000 per year plus benefits and housing supplement. Send a cover letter and résumé to

Helju Batchelder
The Experiment in International Living
Kipling Road
Brattleboro, Vermont 05301
U.S.A.

AETK urges all its members to join TESOL. An application form to do so is reprinted below. Just fill it in and send it with a check in U.S. funds or other form of international payment. As a member of TESOL, you will receive the TESOL Quarterly, the TESOL Newsletter, and newsletters from Special Interest Groups (SIGs).

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- REGULAR MEMBERSHIP..... \$ 30.00
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VOLUNTEER (Circle appropriate one)..... \$ 15.00

Additional mailing fee

- FOREIGN SURFACE MAIL ADD \$5.00
- FOREIGN AIR MAIL ADD \$15.00

Mark with (x) the SIG in which you wish to be active and vote.
Mark with (—) not more than two SIGs whose newsletter you would like to receive.

- _____ Teaching English Abroad
- _____ English as a Foreign Language, for foreign students in English-speaking countries
- _____ English as a Second Language in Elementary Schools
- _____ English as a Second Language in Secondary Schools
- _____ English as a Second Language in Higher Education
- _____ English as a Second Language in Bilingual Education
- _____ English as a Second Language in Adult Education
- _____ Standard English as a Second Dialect
- _____ Applied Linguistics (relevant linguistic studies and research)

