

**A Comparative Study Of Chinese ESL Learners from Malaysia and The People's
Republic Of China in Their Pronunciation of /r/ & /l/**

Nik Rahila bt Dato'Wan Ibrahim

nikrahila@kutkm.edu.my

Mohd Fauzi Kamarudin
mohdfauzi@kutkm.edu.my

*** Corresponding author**

mohdfauzi@utem.edu.my

Sharimllah Devi Ramachandran

sharimllah@kutkm.edu.my

Department of Communication, Pusat Bahasa & Pembangunan Insan
Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Locked Bag 1200
Ayer Keroh, 75450, Melaka,
Malaysia

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE ESL LEARNERS FROM MALAYSIA AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THEIR PRONUNCIATION OF /R/ & /L/

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate if consonants /r/ presented similar problems for Chinese ESL students from Malaysia and Chinese ESL students from the People's Republic of China. Both groups of students were enrolled in ESL classes in Malaysia at the time of the study, and they were all ethnic Chinese, but they came from different countries, and have had different previous language-learning experiences. Respondents were asked to read four word lists and a poem made up of different percentages of words containing /r/ in initial or medial positions. Interestingly, the results indicated that the ESL students from Malaysia generally have more problems in pronouncing /r/ than students from the People's Republic of China. This paper elaborated the implications the study has for formulating strategies to better deliver pronunciation skills in order to minimise, if not eliminate this problem among the Chinese ESL students from Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Malaysia is one of the countries in the world that uses the English Language as an official second language. The Malaysian Education System has made it compulsory for students in the primary and secondary school to learn English for at least 11 years, and they are also required to pass the English Language paper in every examination that they are required to sit for as they go along in their academic years.

The fact that English is so important and widely used and learnt is what makes learners of English as a Second Language from other parts of the world come to Malaysia to learn English. In addition to Malaysia's already multi-racial nature, students from all over the world, including China, Korea, Japan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Africa, Indonesia and Thailand, to name a few, have chosen Malaysia as a place to improve their English. Apart from the large number of public schools, private English schools are booming like mushrooms all over the country to accommodate the rising number of foreign students and provide English Language classes for these students.

One such school system is the ELS International Language Centres. ELS, which stands for *English Language Systems*, has 5 branches in Malaysia and over 90 centres in the world. ELS International Language centres was first set up in America and the English Language teaching materials have largely been adopted from the U.S.A. The fact that it

has over 38 years of experience teaching English makes it an easy choice for an English Language learner to choose this school as a premise to improve his or her proficiency in the language. In ELS there are several programs offered by the school to cater for the different needs of the learners from all over the world, and each comes with a different set of curriculums as well. However, the program that the researcher has selected is the program called 'Certified Intensive English Program' which represents the largest group of students in the school and the program which offers the learning of English in the most intensive and concentrated way.

A large number of the foreign students are from the People's Republic of China (PRC). Reasons like unavailability of places in local schools, teachers teaching English in Chinese and the lack of exposure to English in a Chinese-speaking environment – thus making it difficult to use English in daily activities, are among the reasons why these students are willing to pay a considerable amount of money and leave behind their families in China in the quest to learn English in Malaysia. In Malaysia, these students would be mingling and speaking English with other students of different first languages and cultures, increasing the need to use the language and consequently improving their level of proficiency in the language.

At the same time, besides these international students, as mentioned above, there is also a large percentage of Malaysian students who feel that their 11 years of learning English in their school years have not made them sufficiently proficient in the language. This is particularly true for Chinese students who go to Chinese schools in the rural areas of Malaysia, where although English is being taught in schools, the use of the language as a daily communication tool is scarce. These students, mainly those who have graduated high schools and are in search of a better life in the cities, realize the importance of having a good command of the language and thus, come to study English as well at these private English schools.

Therefore, there is quite a balance of local and foreign students in these private English schools. Different students coming from different cultures and first languages face different interference problems from the native language. However, students from different countries who share the same native language face different problems too. This paper attempts to study what their native languages are and how for their English exposure has been.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There are many styles, accents and ways of pronunciation that one can adopt when speaking English. It is usually in speech that one notices the variety of English being used, and it is usually during speech that the nationality of the speaker can be guessed. When a second language learner speaks English, the way in which he or she pronounces English words are sometimes indications of where he or she is from. This is usually caused by interference from their native language. For Malaysian Chinese, for example, the pronunciation of the consonant /r/ in English words may be problematic for them. Many substitute the consonant /r/ with /l/, as in 'labbit' for 'rabbit'. Kenworthy, J.

(1987:129) in her book *Teaching English Pronunciation* agrees that among Chinese ESL learners, on the sound /r/ and /l/, there is indeed a “well-known perceptual conception between these two sounds, and a production difficulty”. She further states that these particular learners have a tendency to use a sound which sounds most like an /r/ to the English ear for both sounds;

‘all’ may sound like ‘or’
‘fell’ may sound like ‘fear’
‘fall’ may sound like ‘four’

but in initial position an /l/-like sound is often substituted for /r/;

‘ride’ may sound like ‘lied’
‘raid’ may sound like ‘laid’

The same problems occur when these two sounds are grouped with other sounds in a sequence or a cluster;

‘blue’ may sound like ‘brew’
‘flight’ may sound like ‘fright’
‘clutch’ may sound like ‘crutch’

(Kenworthy, 1987:129)

If students are of the same ethnic origin, teachers often tend to assume that their language learning eccentricities will be the same. They are assumed to excel in the same aspects of the language, and fail in others; in other words, they are assumed to have been developing the same language learning experiences. This is sometimes true but would this case also be true for students who are of the same ethnic origin but who come from different countries? On this note, however, would this same sound prove problematic for Chinese students from the People’s Republic of China?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that this study attempts to answer are;

- a. Is the pronunciation of the consonant /r/ problematic for ESL Chinese learners from Malaysia and the People’s Republic of China?
- b. If the pronunciation of the consonant /r/ is problematic for these learners, do they substitute /r/ with other sounds?
- c. Does substitution occur when words containing the /r/ sound are presented:
 - i. as discreet items?
 - ii. in connected text?
- d. Is there a difference in the way both group of students substitute /r/ with other sounds?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to elicit responses from these ESL learners from Malaysia and the People’s Republic of China, the study required respondents to read discreet items from word lists and verses of a poem containing the /r/ sound in various positions. The first instrument, -

the word lists- were to indicate how the students performed when they focused on individual words. The respondents were then required to read a piece of continuous text, namely, verses of a poem. It is assumed that respondents are more cautious and more conscious of their pronunciation when reading word lists than they are when they read the poem.

It is hoped that this study will provide insights on the circumstances under which interference occurs in the pronunciation of /r/ for Chinese ESL learners. These language problems, no matter how small or big, should not be at all looked down upon and should always be considered as an active transition from one stage of language development to another.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The Respondents

The respondents were 40 English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners from a local English Language learning center, ELS Language Centers, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. 20 of these respondents are Chinese students from Malaysia, whereas the remaining 20 are Chinese students from the People's Republic of China. The number of respondents was decided in view of time constraints and opportunities for meetings with the researcher, as the respondents have full-day classes daily in the learning center. Preliminary, informal conversations with the respondents indicate that they are very committed to their studies. They regularly spend hours after class and even on weekends revising their studies for exams and assignments.

ELS courses are ranked from level 100; the lowest level of proficiency, to level 109; the highest. The respondents were at the intermediate level, that is between level 103 to level 105. By this time, the respondents would have had at least 3 months of English Language training in ELS International School. The school curriculum is designed in such a way that speaking is given the same priority as the other components such as writing, reading, listening and grammar. Although some attention is given to speech training and good pronunciation, errors are not pinpointed and corrected as learners make the mistakes, but rather, errors are given the attention in relation to the other language skills, such as listening, reading and writing. This group of respondents represents the majority of students learning English at the center.

The respondents aged between 15 to 25 and they are mainly currently, or will be, in the near future, studying in local colleges or colleges in other parts of the world. Thus, their general reasons for learning English would be mainly to improve themselves in the speaking, reading, listening and writing aspects of the English Language to further their studies overseas or to enhance knowledge of the language for their current studies at college, as well as to enable themselves to apply for a good, English-speaking job. Consequently, the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in these students is very high. There was an equal number of males and females among the respondents.

THE DATA COLLECTION

Renowned linguists have provided very practical and useful ways of collecting and analyzing data on pronunciation as some below.

The method and analysis for this research has largely been adopted from Wardhaugh (1986). He suggests that the usual data collection device is a questionnaire designed to elicit data in using the variables that are being investigated. This particular questionnaire must be designed to elicit data in a variety of circumstances, for example, in categories of

- a. a casual situation, with sub-categories such as speech outside the formal interview, a conversation with a third party, responses to general questions and so on
- b. the reading aloud of a story
- c. an interview situation
- d. the reading aloud of word lists

In this particular study, the researcher employs methods (b) and (d), with a slight difference, namely, a story was substituted with a poem. Part (b) was presented in another setting.

Labov (1966) has also given meaningful insights in to providing the terms “careful” and “casual” speech. To him, the four types of careful speech, from most to least careful, were: reading lists of close pairs (e.g. ‘den’ and ‘then’), reading lists of words, reading a prose passage and participating in a formal interview. On the other hand, his five types of casual speech came from situations such as speech outside the formal interview, conversation with a third party, responses to questions, telling rhymes and recounting an incident which might have proved fatal.

These methods of data collection have been helpful in providing a systematic way for the researcher to conduct this research.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The instruments used in this research were four word lists, a poem, a cassette recorded and a cassette tape to record the responses. The word lists were self-constructed by the researcher and the poem was adapted from a school textbook.

Word Lists

The research instrument consisted of four word lists. The word lists are:

- a. Word List 1 – 50% words with ‘r’ in medial position
- b. Word List 2 – 50% words with ‘r’ in initial position
- c. Word List 3 – 100% words with ‘r’ in medial position
- d. Word List 4 – 100% words with ‘r’ in initial position

Table 1 below contains the word lists.

<u>WORD LIST 1</u>	<u>WORD LIST 2</u>	<u>WORD LIST 3</u>	<u>WORD LIST 4</u>
- 50% of words with /r/ in medial position	- 50% of words with /r/ in initial position	- 100% of words with /r/ in medial position	- 100% of words with /r/ in initial position
a. exam	a. rubber	a. barren	a. raccoon
b. parent	b. student	b. sorry	b. rattan
c. strawberry	c. roasted	c. very	c. roller
d. blaze	d. shopping	d. borrow	d. rat
e. chocolate	e. telephone	e. Larry	e. rampage
f. sprinter	f. run	f. browse	f. roots
g. irony	g. reason	g. fragile	g. rider
h. story	h. rinse	h. cream	h. rice
i. terrace	i. rayon	i. brisk	i. rock
j. pencil	j. pillow	j. creep	j. respond
k. borrow	k. regular	k. sorrow	k. rescue
l. diskette	l. food	l. eraser	l. Romeo

These word lists were designed to gauge the respondents' ability to pronounce the consonant /r/ in initial and medial positions. There are twelve words in each list. The first word list have words with the consonant /r/ in medial position 50% of the time as well as other words that do not contain the consonant /r/ at all as the other 50% of the time. The second word list have words with the consonant /r/ in the initial position 50% of the time and other words which do not contain the consonant /r/ at all as the other 50% of the time. On the other hand, the third word list contain only words with the consonant /r/ in the medial position, while the final word list have only words with the consonant /r/ in the initial position.

The first two word lists are meant to present the stimulus in such a way that the respondents are not aware that they are tested as much as they are in the remaining two word lists. As far as possible, the researcher was careful to select words that are commonly used in their everyday conversation. This is because the research is not meant to judge the respondents' level of vocabulary, but to test their abilities to pronounce the consonant /r/ in these words. The use of familiar words is also hoped to have increased the respondents' level of comfort and confidence. This way, the research would not have been intimidating to the respondents.

The poem

Finally, the respondents were asked to read four verses of a poem, with each verse containing four lines. This is continuous test, so it was assumed that the students would not have been too conscious of what was being observed. About 20% of words in this poem contain the consonant /r/ in various positions, including initial and medial positions. The poem used is as follows:

I've got whiskers and I've got fur,
I don't bark but I do purr,
Make me angry and I'll scratch,
My hobby is waiting for a rat to catch.

My world is watery and wet,
That's why you can't see me sweat,
I can live in a tank but I prefer a bowl,
So that I can show off my fins and scales of gold.

I don't eat meat but carrots I like,
My two front teeth are sharp like spikes,
My ears are long and my fur has no lice,
I make a good pet because I'm gentle and nice.

I've claws for toes and wings instead of hands,
So I can fly over the seas and land,
Mind your language when in front of me you speak,
For I can repeat even though my mouth is a hooked beak.

The respondents, individually, were asked to read 4 word lists in this order:

- e. Word List 1 – 50% words with 'r' in medial position
- f. Word List 2 – 50% words with 'r' in initial position
- g. Word List 3 – 100% words with 'r' in medial position
- h. Word List 4 – 100% words with 'r' in initial position

The respondents were given all the four word lists simultaneously. They were then given about 15 seconds to look through the words silently and most of the respondents were seen to silently mouth the words during this time. When the 15 seconds were up, the respondents were asked to read the words aloud. There was no time limit given. However, they were asked not to pause for too long and should also be relatively comfortable and in a relaxed speed of reading. The respondents were allowed to self-correct themselves once per word but with no help from the researcher whatsoever. Other than that, no repetition was allowed. While the students were reading, the responses were audiotaped by the researcher.

Next, the respondents were given four verses of a poem for them to read aloud. Again the respondents were given about 15 seconds to read the poem silently and then they were asked to read the poem aloud. There was no time limit set for this activity either, nor there be significant pauses in between words or phrases. The respondents, however, were

allowed to self-correct. No repetitions were allowed as well. The researcher again, should not at all help in the pronunciation as the responses are recorded. That was the end of the data elicitation procedure.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Pronunciation of /r/ in medial position (Word Lists 1 & 3)

This section presents and discusses the results of the read-alouds.

Words with /r/ in the medial position

Table 8 shows the instances of correct and incorrect pronunciation of /r/ in words with /r/ in medial position.

Table 8: Results for word list with 50% words with /r/ in medial position

Key: X – the number of students who made an error

Y – the percentage of students who made an error

M – Chinese students from Malaysia

C – Chinese students from the People’s Republic of China

WORD LIST 1	X		Y	
	M	C	M	C
a. exam	0	0	0	0
b. parent	0	0	0	0
c. strawberry	10	2	50	10
d. blaze	3	1	15	5
e. chocolate	3	0	15	0
f. sprinter	2	0	10	0
g. irony	0	0	0	0
h. story	0	0	0	0
i. terrace	0	0	0	0
j. pencil	0	0	0	0
k. borrow	0	0	0	0
l. diskette	0	0	0	0

The results show that not many mistakes were made by both groups in pronouncing the consonant /r/ in medial position. However, the word ‘strawberry’ seems to be problematic for 50% of Malaysian respondents and 10% of the Chinese from PRC respondents. This is probably due to the consonant clusters in the word and the fact that it contains 3 /r/s. Other problematic words, surprisingly, are ‘blaze’ and ‘chocolate’ where 15% of Malaysians could not pronounce each of these words and 5% of the Chinese from PRC could not pronounce the former correctly. They all substituted the consonant /l/ with the /r/ sound. Although this result is not directly affecting the research, it certainly holds appeal for another study. The other words were pronounced correctly by all respondents.

Table 9 shows the instances of correct and incorrect pronunciation of /r/ in words with /r/ in medial positions.

Table 9: Results for word list with 100% words with /r/ in medial position

Key: X – the number of students who made an error

Y – the percentage of students who made an error
M – Chinese students from Malaysia
C – Chinese students from the People’s Republic of China

WORD LIST 3	X		Y	
	M	C	M	C
a. barren	0	0	0	0
b. sorry	0	0	0	0
c. very	0	0	0	0
d. borrow	0	0	0	0
e. Larry	10	0	50	0
f. browse	4	0	20	0
g. fragile	4	0	20	0
h. cream	0	0	0	0
i. brisk	5	0	25	0
j. creep	2	0	10	0
k. sorrow	2	0	10	0
l. eraser	0	0	0	0

For the word list that contains only words with /r/ in medial position, there was a perfect no-mistake record for the respondents from China. However, for the Malaysians, there were six words that were mispronounced. 50% of the students pronounced ‘Larry’ as ‘Rarry’. A smaller percentage had problems articulating the consonant /r/ in words like ‘browse’, ‘fragile’, ‘brisk’ and ‘creep’. This is probably due to the consonant clusters that occur in these words and takes more effort, thinking and time to be able to be pronounced correctly.

Pronunciation of /r/ in initial positions (Word Lists 2 & 4)

In this section, results from word lists 2 and 4 with words that contain /r/ in initial position are presented and discussed.

Table 10 shows the instances of correct and incorrect pronunciations of /r/ in words with /r/ in initial positions.

Table 10: Results for word list with 50% words with /r/ in initial position

Key: X – the number of students who made an error
Y – the percentage of students who made an error
M – Chinese students from Malaysia
C – Chinese students from the People’s Republic of China

WORD LIST 2	X		Y	
	M	C	M	C
a. rubber	0	0	0	0
b. student	0	0	0	0
c. roasted	0	0	0	0
d. shopping	0	0	0	0
e. telephone	0	0	0	0

f. run	0	0	0	0
g. reason	0	0	0	0
h. rinse	1	0	5	0
i. rayon	0	2	0	10
j. pillow	7	0	35	0
k. regular	5	2	25	10
l. food	0	0	0	0

The results show that although there is not a word that seems to be a problem for the Chinese from PRC students, two words seem to cause problems for 7 and 5 Malaysian respondents respectively: ‘pillow’ and ‘regular’. For both words, again, the Malaysian Chinese pronounced the consonant /l/ as /r/, making it sound like ‘pirrow’ instead of ‘pillow’, and ‘legular’ instead of ‘regular’. As this is a second instance of this has happened, the consonant /l/ in medial position seems to present an obstacle for the Malaysian respondents; it is substituted with /r/.

Table 11 shows the instances of correct and incorrect pronunciation of /r/ in words with /r/ in initial position.

Table 11: Results for word list with 100% words with /r/ in initial position

Key: X – the number of students who made an error

Y – the percentage of students who made an error

M – Chinese students from Malaysia

C – Chinese students from the People’s Republic of China

WORD LIST 4	X		Y	
	M	C	M	C
a. raccoon	2	0	10	0
b. rattan	1	0	5	0
c. roller	9	10	45	50
d. rat	3	0	15	0
e. rampage	0	0	0	0
f. roots	1	0	5	0
g. rider	0	0	0	0
h. rice	2	0	10	0
i. rock	0	0	0	0
j. respond	0	0	0	0
k. rescue	1	2	5	10
l. Romeo	0	0	0	0

Results show that one word seemed to have been problematic for both groups: ‘roller’. Again, the consonant /r/ seem to have been the culprit here as most of the respondents ended up saying ‘loller’ instead of ‘roller’ as they substituted the consonant /r/ with /l/.

Summary of results for word lists

In summary, the results show that the Malaysian respondents generally have more problems articulating the consonant /r/ than the respondents from the People's Republic of China, in pronouncing /r/ in discrete words containing the consonant.

This is evident from the results for word lists 2 and 4, with /r/ in the initial position. The respondents from Malaysia mispronounced 11% of the words while respondents from the People's Republic of China mispronounced only 5.5% of the words. The results are similar for the next set of word lists, word lists 1 and 3 that contain /r/ in medial position. In these lists, 28% of the words were mispronounced by respondents from Malaysia, but only 5.5% of the words were mispronounced by the respondents from the People's Republic of China. In total, the overall percentage of words mispronounced by the Malaysian respondents in all the four word lists is 19%, whereas for the respondents from the People's Republic of China, the percentage is a low 5.5%.

Hence, it can be concluded that Malaysian respondents have made more mistakes in pronouncing words with /r/ in both initial and medial positions when the words were presented as discrete items.

At the same time, it can be observed that more respondents from Malaysia made pronunciation mistakes than the respondents from the People's Republic of China. In reading word lists 1 and 3, 11% of the Malaysian respondents in pronouncing /r/ in medial position while only 0.5% of the respondents from the People's Republic of China did. In addition, 7% of the Malaysian respondents mispronounced /r/ in initial positions, in word lists 2 and 4, while only 4% of their Chinese counterparts did do. This gives a total of 18% Malaysian respondents who mispronounced /r/ in all the word lists, while only 4.5% of the respondents from the People's Republic of China did so. This shows that not only do more Malaysian respondents pronounced more words wrongly, but more respondents demonstrated mispronunciation as well.

The poem

In the poem, there are six words with /r/ in the medial position and two words with /r/ in the initial position. They are 'angry', 'scratch', 'watery', 'prefer', 'carrots', 'front', 'rat' and 'repeat'. Out of these eight words, only one word 'scratch' was mispronounced by both groups of respondents. Thus, the percentage of mispronounced words for the poem for both groups is 12.5%.

In view of the respondents, it is found that 30% of the Malaysian respondents mispronounced this word while only 15% of the respondents from the People's Republic of China did so. Again, this shows that more Malaysian respondents mispronounced the word.

Comparison between the word lists and the poem

This section compares the results obtained from the reading of the word lists and poem.

Considering the word lists and the poem together, the Malaysian respondents mispronounced 31.5% of the words containing the consonant /r/ in both initial and medial positions. On the other hand, the respondents from the People's Republic of China mispronounced 18% of the words containing /r/ in both positions. This result confirms that the Malaysian respondents have made more 13.5% of mistakes in pronouncing /r/ in both positions than the respondents from the People's Republic of China.

At the same time, both groups of respondents put together have made a percentage of 30% of mistakes in pronouncing /r/ in the word lists as discrete items. However, a total of 22% of respondents from the two groups made mistakes in pronouncing /r/ in the verses of the poem, as continuous text. This shows that generally, respondents made more mistakes in pronouncing /r/ in the words presented in discrete items than those in the verses of the poem.

A possible explanation for this is that the word lists were given first, thus making the respondents feel nervous, leading them to mispronounce some of the /r/ in the words. On the other hand, the poem was given only after the three word lists had been read out, during which the respondents could have felt more comfortable with the research procedure.

Substitution of /l/ with /r/

Another mispronunciation evident among the Malaysian respondents was the substitution of /l/ with /r/. A number of respondents from Malaysia substituted the consonant /r/ with the consonant /l/ in words such as 'blaze', 'chocolate', 'Larry' and 'pillow' where they have substituted all the /l/s in these words with /r/s. Similarly, for the poem, the consonant /r/ in words such as 'long', 'claws', 'fly' and 'scales' were evidently replaced by the consonant /l/. However, this phenomena was not observed among the respondents from the People's Republic of China.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The result can therefore be summarized as such.

For the Malaysian respondents,

- a. the consonant /r/ in both initial and medial positions can be difficult to pronounce if it occurs more than once
- b. the consonant /r/ in both initial and medial positions can be difficult to pronounce if there are consonant clusters and diphthongs in the word
- c. the consonant /r/ in both initial and medial positions can be difficult to pronounce if there is also a consonant /l/ in the word

However, for the Chinese respondents from the People's Republic of China,

- a. the consonant /r/ in both initial and medial positions can be difficult to pronounce if there is also a consonant /l/ in the word
- b. the consonant /r/ in both initial and medial positions can be difficult to pronounce if it occurs more than once

Therefore, it can be concluded that the /r/ sound does prove problematic for both groups of ESL learners, but more so for the Malaysians than for the learners from the People's Republic of China. The results also show that both groups of learners substitute the /r/ sound with /l/. This was evident in the study, in words such as 'browse' which became 'blowse', 'fragile' which became 'flagile', 'brisk' which became 'blisk' and 'creep' which became 'cleep'.

Another phenomenon that could be observed was that the respondents also exhibited a reverse trend, that is, they tended to substitute /l/ with /r/. This was evident in words such as 'blaze' which became 'braze', 'chocolate' which became 'chocorate', 'Larry' which became 'Rarry' and 'pillow' which became 'pirrow'. The substitution of /r/ and /l/ and the reverse trend suggests that the learners may be confused between /r/ and /l/ in speech.

Regarding the pronunciation of /r/ in discrete items and continuous text, the results show that the learners made more mistakes with that sound when reading the discrete items than when they read a piece of continuous text. This may suggest that the learners are more confused with the sounds /r/ and /l/ when the words do not occur in natural-sounding discourse. Contrary to expectation, a conscious focus on the discrete items and specific sounds may have led to greater confusion.

In conclusion, the Chinese ESL learners from Malaysia in this study made more mispronunciations of /r/ than the ESL learners from the People's Republic of China.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The number of respondents could be increased to enable greater generalizability. This would provide a wide range of responses related to level of education and background, for consideration.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study has shown that the ESL Chinese learners from Malaysia appear to have greater problem pronouncing /r/ in words than Chinese learners from the People's Republic of China. The differences possibly exist because of the differing degrees of emphasis on oral speech and phonetic training in the two countries' ESL classes. Other factors include L1 interference and exposure to different languages.

These possible reasons, therefore, should be taken into consideration by instructors of the English Language, not only in Malaysia, but all over the world, particularly when they encounter these two groups of students. Teachers of English should bear in mind that

English Language learners should not be considered homogenous just because they come from the same country or share the same first language.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

For further research, respondents could also include Korean and Japanese students, who do not speak the same first language but who share similar sounds in the languages. This would give a wider range of respondents in terms of the background and previous education background.

Next, the methodology could be expanded to include personal oral interviews with each of the respondents to obtain more data on pronunciation under various test conditions. Studies could also be carried out to find out why consonant clusters and diphthongs seem to be creating problems for these students as well. These research studies would certainly provide more interest.

REFERENCES

- Giglioli, P.P. (1980) Language and Social Context Cox and Wyman, Ltd: United Kingdom
- Hammerly, H. (1991) Fluency and Accuracy: Toward Balance in Language Teaching and Learning Multilingual Matters Ltd: Avon, England
- Haugen, (1979) ed. by Pride, J.B. (1979) Sociolinguistic Aspects of Language Learning and Teaching Oxford University Press: London, United Kingdom
- Hudson, R.A. (1980) Sociolinguistics Cambridge University Press: United Kingdom
- Huizhong, Y. (1985) English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Languages and Literatures New York: Cambridge University Press
- Jones, D. (1962) An outline of English Phonetics England: W. Hefner and Sons Ltd.
- Kenworthy, Joanne (1987) Teaching English Pronunciation New York: Longman Pte. Ltd
- Lado, Robert (1974) Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach New Delhi: McGraw-Hill
- Mackey, William F. (1965) Language Teaching Analysis London: Longman Pte. Ltd
- Mackey, William F. (1962) ed. by Pride, J.B. (1979) Sociolinguistic Aspects of Language Learning and Teaching Oxford University Press: London, United Kingdom
- Omar, A. (1982) Language and Society in Malaysia Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka: Kuala Lumpur
- Spolsky, B., Cooper, R.L. (ed) (1979) Case Studies in Bilingual Education Newbury House Publishers: Rowley, Massachusetts
- Wardhaugh, R. (1986) An Introduction to Sociolinguistics United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers