

Good Morning or Goon/Goom Morning?

Ilsung Yun (Department of Linguistics, Seoul National University)

isyun@popsmail.com

Learners of a foreign language are influenced by their learned sound system (phonology) when they hear and speak the language. Therefore, we can even say that the main task in teaching pronunciation of a foreign language is how to help them free from the speaking habits of their mother tongue.

There are some important reasons for wrong listening and speaking of foreign languages. First, different languages have different phonological rules. Spaniards may insert a vowel /ε/ in the initial position to articulate English words beginning with /sC/ consonant sequences (e.g., *Stuart*, *speak*) where C is an abbreviation for consonant. This is because Spanish has the ε-insertion rule before word-initial /sC/ consonant clusters. Second, each language has different phonemes. For instance, French and German have fewer phonemes than English has (e.g., French and German do not have the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/). Therefore, French and German may not properly pronounce the final consonant /θ/ of the word *shibboleth*; they may say *the* as /zə/ (Poole, 1999). Third, languages can be substantially different in the variety of syllable structures. Korean has four possible syllable structures (V, CV, VC, CVC). Hence English words with other syllable structures such as CCCVC are not allowed in the psychology of Korean speakers (the phonology of Korean). This leads Korean speakers to regard the English word *strike* as having five syllables (i.e. /si-ti-ra-i-ki/). It is also noted that

Korean does not have the diphthong /ai/ that English does.

Unlike the above reasons, improper listening and speaking of foreign languages can also stem from the same phonetic or phonological phenomenon that L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) have in common, which is however markedly different in its applied range, frequency and/or degree between L1 and L2. Assimilation (nasalization) can be the example. This study is focused on the nasalization (regressive assimilation) of English word final stops followed by nasals. With regard to this nasalization, interestingly, Korean and English native speakers show both some similarities and remarkable differences. When a native Korean speaks English, the word-final English stops /p, b, t, d, k, g/ assimilate into the following word-initial nasals /m, n/, e.g., Good [gun/gum] Morning. (for more examples, see Table 1). This is because Korean has the phonological rules: {p, ph} → m/V__# # {m, n}; {t, th} → n/V__# # {m, n}; {k, kh} → ŋ/V__# # {m, n} where # denotes the word boundary. Therefore, nasalization (regressive assimilation) of stop sounds before nasals is obligatory in Korean speakers' psychology. According to Gimson (1989), English speakers may also nasalize the word-final English stops /b, d, g/ before the nasals of the following words and the nasalization is phonemic: But it is suspected that the frequency or degree of nasalization is considerably lower than that of Koreans. Gimson also indicates that this kind of nasality, though it is often a popular form, is not acceptable in RP (Received Pronunciation). Furthermore, such nasalization is confined to the phonologically voiced stops (especially alveolar /d/) and is liable to be realized at a fast rate of (casual) speech. Hence, it is likely that in English, nasalization (regressive assimilation) of stop sounds, if there is, is limited and optional, neither

general nor obligatory. Therefore, for native speakers of English, the possible nasalization is more likely to be a phonetic realisation rather than a phonological one, whereas it is phonological in Korean.

In the light of the above differences and similarities concerning nasalization between Korean and English, Korean speakers should be more careful at pronouncing English word finals /p, t, k/ than their counterparts /b, d, g/ when they are followed by the nasals /m, n/. This is because native speakers of English barely nasalize English word finals /p, t, k/ before nasals. On the other hand, it will probably be less unnatural to nasalize English word final stops /b, d, g/ (in particular, /d/), as English native speakers, though neither all nor always, also may do so. Despite the similarities, however, Korean speakers are required to be careful not to nasalize English word final stops before nasals. This will contribute to reducing foreign accent from their pronunciation.

<Table1> Speech materials

Good morning!

Good night!

I think it's good news.

What does 'cab' mean?

What does 'cook' mean?

Keep mine.

Get up now.

At noon.

That might be true.

Does it matter?

It hit me later on the flight.

What number would like to choose?

<References>

Gimson, A. C. (1989) *An introduction to the pronunciation of English*, 4th ed., Revised by

Ramsaran, S., London: Edward Arnold.

Poole, S. C. (1999) *An Introduction to Linguistics*, Macmillan Press LTD, London.