Speech Errors in English Consonant Clusters of /tr/ and /dr/: A Case Study of Korean College Students*

Hyunjee Kang** (Kyungpook National University)
Myungki Oh*** (Kangwon National University)

Hyunjee Kang and Myungki Oh, 2016. Speech Errors in English Consonant Clusters of /tr/ and /dr/: A Case Study of Korean College Students. *Studies in Modern Grammar* 88, 65–79. It is highly likely that Korean college students often commit inadvertent speech errors of replacing /t/ or /d/ with palato-alveolar */ʧ/ and */ʤ/ in the consonant clusters of /tr/ and /dr/. The writers presume that this is due to their confusion about the place of articulation of /t/ and /d/ with */ʧ/ and */ʤ/ in /tr/ or /dr/ sequence, their lip-rounding difference from that of */ʧ/ and */ʤ/, and finally students’ inaccurate knowledge about the phonetic constraint of */ʧr/ and */ʤr/ in English syllable structure. Under such hypotheses this study analyzes the responses from an experiment group of fifteen Korean college students based on phonetic theories and probes into possible background reasons for this over-production as a form of speech errors.

[Key words: speech error, consonant clusters, palato-alveolar affricates]

1. Introduction

This research survey hypothesizes that Korean college students may commit errors in pronouncing some English consonant clusters, particularly when the clusters are hard to tell from other similar consonants. A salient case is plosives /t/ and /d/ and the palato-alveolar

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** First author
*** Corresponding author
affricates /ʧ/ and /ʤ/ when /t/ and /d/ are followed by retroflex approximant /r/. Presumably the distinction between them is so subtle that speakers quickly mistake one for the other. This, in turn, over-generates /ʧ/ and /ʤ/ in the places for /t/ and /d/. Fundamentally it is because the palato-alveolar affricates /ʧ/ and /ʤ/ and plosives /t/ and /d/ in /tr/ or /dr/ sequences not only involve friction in their articulation process but also have proximal points of articulation. In addition to friction, this study examines other possible reasons such as lip-rounding and phonotactic constraints responsible for Korean college students’ speech errors.

2. Rationale

2.1. Consonant clusters /tr/ and /dr/

English consonants have phoneme /ʧ/ as a voiceless palato–alveolar affricate and /ʤ/ as its voiced counterpart, both of which consist of a plosive and homorganic fricative sequence. If this mere sequence of plosive – fricative is the only condition to be satisfied for affricates, the clusters of /ts/ and /dz/ can also be considered as affricates (Kwak 2001: 125). However, as Ladefoged and Johnson (2011: 67) says, in the English language affricates are generally single units, and this criterion separates palato–alveolar affricates of /ʧ/ and /ʤ/ from other consonant chains. Following their viewpoint, this study considers palato–alveolar /ʧ/ and /ʤ/ as affricates and views other possible alveolar /ts/, /dz/, /tr/ and /dr/ as simple clusters of consonants.

2.2. Friction of /tr/ – /dr/ clusters

Like clusters /ts/ and /dz/, /tr/ and /dr/ also have a chain of plosive and fricative sequence, satisfying the condition for producing friction. Here