

Teaching Pronunciation: Case Study Parameters for Korean Elementary School Learners

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Introduction—Variables of the Target Population

As an introduction, it will be necessary to describe the target population in terms of variables that will be essential for syllabus construction. The model given in Celce-Murcia et. al. (1996) will be employed and will include the following variable types: learner, setting, institutional, linguistic and methodological.

Learner variables:

The target population are Korean elementary school students, grades 4 ~ 6, in an EFL context. Class sizes are large (20 ~ 30 students) and take place at a private academy. The students predominantly come from a middle-class background and have been exposed to English through the media (internet, television and through adverts) but have (almost) no contact with native speakers outside the classroom. They have no need for English nor intelligible pronunciation; consequently, there is no intrinsic motivation to learn English in most cases. On the other hand, students with a higher level of aptitude tend to be motivated by their ability. Further, games and activities that students consider 'fun' generally engage the entire class and encourage participation. English classes with the native speaker teacher meet just one hour a week. Students study with a non-native speaker teacher four hours a week. The NS teacher has been trained in pronunciation and has developed specific activities at both the segmental and suprasegmental levels. The NNS teachers have no formal training, and while they are intelligible, their pronunciation of English retains some of the problems that this syllabus seeks to correct. The needs analysis is restricted to a contrastive approach between Korean

and English and is addressed in the Linguistic variables below. The ultimate goal in terms of the learner is basic intelligibility

Setting variables:

As mentioned, the target group is homogenous in an EFL setting. The learners are elementary school students and because they don't use English outside the classroom, they consider their lessons as a school subject as opposed to a future means to communicate as a part of an international community. There is no imposing 'national language policy' but there is an attempt by the parents as well as public and private educators to encourage young learners to study and acquire the English language. This is evident in the extraordinary number of private English academies which seem to operate in every neighborhood nationwide.

Institutional variables:

The curriculum in this study is [The Language Works Online English Classroom](#) (Ctrl + click to access) and is entirely oral in nature. Only the assessments require pencil and paper. It leans towards a structural syllabus with a lexical format; that is, an attempt was made to introduce the most common vocabulary in a manner that would scaffold the learner into more difficult forms. The curriculum was designed specifically for young learners in large classrooms and must employ a computer with internet access and a screen large enough for proper visibility. The pronunciation syllabus—which is one element in the curriculum—is also entirely oral and the activities can be carried out without pencil and paper. It has an audio format and requires listening before production.

Linguistic variables:

For this homogenous target population, the linguistic approach in this syllabus must take into account the complexity of English pronunciation from a contrastive point of view. The activities will focus on a sample of problems facing Korean EFL young learner beginners that appear to adversely affect intelligibility and that have a reasonable level of teachability. They are listed here:

1) Phonemes:

The 'missing' consonants (not phonemically represented in Korean) that will be addressed in this syllabus are /r/, /f/, /v/ and the voiced and unvoiced "th". The predominant vowel challenge can be described as the distinction between some lax and tense forms. The focus in this syllabus will be on /I/ and /iy/ pair as in "hill" and "heel". While some students will have great difficulty in changing their pronunciation habits in regards to phonemes, the activities in this syllabus aim to raise consciousness and improve intelligibility.

2) Word stress (and other suprasegmental elements NOT addressed in the activities) are subject to corrective feedback in this syllabus. Explicit correction is favored but recasts and repetition along with paralinguistic cues (claps and gestures, for example) may be enough to prompt for correct forms. We use Ellis (2008) as a reference for CF implementation.

3) Forms of connected speech/Sandhi variation:

Word final epenthesis is evident in beginner learner speakers in the target population. Experience shows that it is teachable, that is, students can correct their errors through practice. Two forms of epenthesis will be addressed: the inflectional –ed in the past tense verbs and various word final consonants. Using segmental analysis (Kim, et. al. 2004) we can account for epenthesis in two ways: one, Korean does not allow consonant clusters (as in "washed") and two, Korean does not allow voiced stops (as in "decide") in the word final position.

4) Sentence stress and intonation:

Regarding suprasegmental variables in general, Kim, et. al. (2004) offers three angles from which we can view the challenges facing Korean learners:

- i) A longer duration of function words is expected since Korean is a syllable-timed language.
- ii) Korean timing beat or 'pulse' disregards stress, so a higher variance in foot duration is expected.

This is taken to mean that there will be a variation in the duration of intonation units between English and Korean.

- iii) Flat or opposite pitch slopes are expected because Korean doesn't have lexical stress. This is taken to mean that the rises and falls in pitch patterns will generally not follow the NAE model.

To be sure, Korean is an intonational language (sometimes in a very 'sing-song' manner). In this way, learners are well aware of the acoustic nature of intonation contours/pitch patterns. The activities in this syllabus that address both segmentals and suprasegmentals claim to be teachable and comprehensive enough to invite intelligibility.

Methodological variables:

The methodology in the pronunciation syllabus (as an element in the curriculum mentioned above) is audio-lingual in nature: focus on accuracy, explicit corrective feedback, minimal pairs and pronunciation at the beginner level. There is an element of a more 'ecological approach' as well, since learners are encouraged to seek out opportunities for interaction in definitions, dialogs and open-ended questions. The degree to which learners are able to take up affordances and reorganize the language of interaction into emergent levels of communication will belong to the degree of successful mediation between interlocutors, and this is beyond the scope of the activities themselves.

Pronunciation objectives/goals

- 1) To increase intelligibility (as an aspect of production) through an understanding of the main differences in consonant and vowel production between Korean and English
- 2) To improve comprehension (as an aspect of listening) of segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English.
- 3) To develop a basic understanding of the selected suprasegmental aspects of English.
- 4) To utilize the activities as a means for mediating effective language use.

Selection

The main source for carrying out the pronunciation objectives of this course are activities created using contrastive analysis (Korean versus English) and communicative activities designed for large young learner groups (selection is based on experience and will be subjective). The consonants that

will be addressed in this syllabus are /r/, /f/, /v/ and the voiced and unvoiced "th". The predominant vowel will be the /I/ and /iy/ as in "hill" and "heel". A minimal pair activity will be employed. Word final epenthesis, sentence stress and intonation will round out the set of activities. All nine files are presented in a game format.

Arrangement and Presentation

The activities in the syllabus (arranged and presented) are to be found on the following web page:

[The Language Works Pronunciation Syllabus](#) (Ctrl + click to link).

Application

As stated previously, the files in the pronunciation syllabus are part of a larger curriculum and are to be employed on a 'perceived need' basis; that is, the teacher can select specific files and carry out the activities as learner difficulties in pronunciation become evident. There are no constraints on the teacher's selection of activities nor is there any authority to consult regarding a lesson plan. The teacher enjoys full autonomy in these matters.

Assessment

The aim of assessment is to offer a means to determine whether the course goals/objectives have been met. Objectives one, two and three (listed above) can be assessed using the instrument in Appendix: B and the flash files available online: The Language Works Pronunciation Syllabus. The educator may wish to select specific files (e.g., minimal pair files only) for assessment if there is a shortage of time.

Brockley, T. (2006) [The Language Works online English classroom](#) *A flash file curriculum for teachers of young learners*, <http://eslenglishclassroom.com/> (press Ctrl + click to follow the link)

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Minimal Pairs "_____" 1/2 Points ____/____																			
-																			
Activity Two: "_____" Points ____/____																			
-																			
Activity Three: "_____" Points ____/____																			
-																			
Activity Four: "_____" Points ____/____																			
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Other Activity: "_____" Points ____/____																			
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Total Points _____/_____ Grade _____ Final Grade																			
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