

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I An Overview of Language

SECTION II Individual Sounds of English

SECTION III Linguistic Interference



SECTION IV Practice of Sentences

SECTION V Pronunciation Activities and Bibliography



LINGUISTIC INTERFERENCE

Introduction

ESL teachers are continually coping with the problem of acceptable, understandable pronunciation from students. They need to understand why Peter from Poland cannot say "th", or why John from Hungary is saying "v", when they are attempting to teach him to say "w". ESL teachers can avoid much frustration if they are made aware of the basic linguistic interference that students bring from their native languages. This interference includes pronunciation, syntax, and grammar. If teachers are aware of the interference they can, in many cases, find alternatives and improve student pronunciation dramatically.

An example of this occurs with students whose native language is Spanish. They do not think they can pronounce words like "this" or "thirteen"; however, that sound **DOES** occur in the Spanish language. The problem is that it is not used at the beginning of words, but at the end of words. When Spanish-speaking students are made aware that they do have that sound in their language, their pronunciation improves immediately.

Another example is in word placement for dates and addresses. In many languages, the date is given with the number first, the month second, and the year last. Similarly, an address is given with the house number first followed by the name of the street, and the zip code followed by the city. Although this linguistic interference is difficult to change, the awareness of the problem is helpful to the ESL teacher.

The problem becomes most difficult when the English sound does not occur in the students' native language at all; however, frustrations can be eased when the ESL teacher is at least aware of these problems.

The following explanation of some of the basic linguistic interference is an attempt to simplify the complicated job of the ESL teacher.

ARABIC

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Arabic uses a non-Roman script alphabet. Reading and writing are from right to left. Traditionally, a book will be opened from the left.
2. Both nouns and adjectives have articles.
3. Adjectives follow nouns. The brown shoes > the shoes the brown.
4. Although accent varies in Arabic speaking countries, the language will be generally understood by educated Arabs.
5. Verb phrases do not occur in Arabic.
6. Since vowels are not written separately in Arabic, they may be left out when an ESL student attempts to write in English. In many cases, street > strt; dress > drs, etc.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. The **R** is formed in the front of the mouth, and it is trilled or rolled.
2. The aspirated **P** as in put does not exist. The sound will resemble a **B** sound. Paper > baber.
3. The **TH** sound does not exist in Arabic.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** will be replaced with **S**. thin > sin.
 - b. Voiced initial **TH** will be replaced with **Z** or **D**. that > zat or dat.
4. The aspirated **T** will sound more like **D**. too > doo.
5. **CH** does not exist. It is replaced by **SH**. cheep > sheep.
6. There is no hard **G** as in go. The **G** is always soft as in gentle.
7. The short vowel sounds can cause difficulties for the ESL learner.

CHINESE

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. There are various styles of writing and reading in Chinese.
 - a. The old, traditional style is written and read in vertical columns, top to bottom, right to left. The front of the book is on the left.
 - b. The new style is written and read horizontally from left to right.
2. Characters are used in place of a phonetic alphabet.
3. Chinese is a tonal language; different tones give different meanings to words. Rhythm and stress can cause problems for ESL students.
4. Chinese is made up of one-syllable words. This can cause much difficulty in the comprehension of long English words.
5. Articles are optional.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. Consonant clusters are rare in Chinese. Since English has many of them, this can create pronunciation problems for the ESL student.
2. The **TH** sound does not exist.
 - a. Voiceless TH will be replaced by **T** or **F**.
think > tink or fink
 - b. Voiced TH will be replaced by **D** or **V**.
that > dat or vat
3. The L and R sounds are difficult to produce since students cannot distinguish the difference between the two sounds. Some will always use "R" for both sounds, while others will always use "L."
glass > grass or grass > glass
blew > brew or brew > blew
4. In the initial position a sound resembling **L** will usually replace an **R**.
road > load
5. Chinese has no **Z** sound. It is replaced with **SH** or **S**.
zip > ship or sip

CROATIAN, SERBIAN

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Croatian and Serbian form two of the four main languages from this area in Europe. They include many dialects and variations in pronunciation and grammar.
2. Croatian uses the Roman alphabet, while Serbian uses the Cyrillic alphabet.
3. Nouns, pronouns, and adjectives must agree in gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter).
4. Verb endings are used in place of pronouns.
5. There are no articles.
6. In a sentence, expressions of time and place occur according to their importance within the context of that sentence.
7. Irregular verbs may be difficult. Perfect tenses will be unfamiliar in meaning.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. Voiced and voiceless **TH** do not exist. Students will tend to pronounce these sounds as **D** or **T**.
both > bod or bot; these > dese or tese
2. The short English vowel sounds are very difficult. Generally, the student tends not to hear the slight variations in these sounds.
3. The letter **R** is rolled.
4. The letter **W** does not exist. It is replaced by **V** or **F**.
want > vant or fant
5. In many cases **V** > **B**, **C** > **S**, and **X** > **H**.
vat > bat; cold > sold; Texas > Tehas

CZECH

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Nouns as well as adjectives have gender (masculine, feminine, and neuter).
2. The endings on the words signify the gender, the person, and the tense.
3. Articles are not used.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. **W** is replaced with a **V** sound.
want > vant
2. **Y**, when used as a vowel, is a long "E" sound.
symbol > seembol
3. **J** is a **Y** sound.
January > YJanuary
4. The **TH** sound does not exist.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** becomes **T**.
think > tink
 - b. Voiced initial **Th** becomes **D**.
these > dese
 - c. Voiceless final **TH** becomes **F**, **S**, or **T**.
with > wif, wis, or wit
 - d. Voiced middle **TH** becomes **D**.
mother > modder
5. Final **G** is replaced by **K**.
pig > pik
6. Final **D** is replaced by **T**.
bad > bat

FARSI (PERSIAN)

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. The alphabet is made up of script which resembles Arabic.
2. Reading and writing are from right to left.
3. Nouns are followed by adjectives.
4. Nouns and pronouns have no gender. The word for **he** and **she** are the same.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. Farsi lacks some of the letters/sounds that occur in the English alphabet. They include **O**, **Q**, **U**, **W**, and **X**. This can cause much difficulty in pronunciation.
2. Initial voiceless **Th** becomes **T** or **S**.
think > tink or sink
3. The sound **W** is replaced by **V**.
want > vant
4. Final **D** becomes **T**.
bad > bat
5. Initial **G** may be replaced by **C**.
goat > coat
6. Short vowels will be difficult.

FRENCH

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. The rhythm in French is different from English, because the stress on words falls near or on the last syllable. English tends to stress the front syllables in connected speech patterns.
2. All nouns in French are masculine or feminine. Since "pencil" is masculine, its corresponding pronoun is "he." Since the noun "pen" is feminine, its corresponding pronoun is "she."
3. Adjectives and articles agree in gender and number with the noun they modify. Generally, descriptive adjectives follow the noun.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. The **Th** sound does not occur in French.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** becomes **S**.
think > sink
 - b. Voiced initial **TH** becomes **Z**.
them > zem
2. The **CH** sound does not occur in French. It is replaced with **SH**.
cheek > sheek
3. The sound of **J** as in "jeep" does not occur in French. It has the sound of "rouge".
4. The **R** sound is difficult. Many French speakers substitute the **R** made at the back of the throat - a "growled" sound. Some will substitute the trilled **R**.
5. **ING** as in "ring" does not occur. Ring may become rin.
6. Final **S** is not pronounced, and final **T** after a vowel is also not pronounced.
7. **P**, **T**, and **K** are not aspirated. They sound more like **B**, **D**, and **G** respectively.
cap > cab; bat > bad; back > bag

GERMAN

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. The rhythm and word stress in German are similar to English.
2. Word order can be very different from English, especially in a complex sentence where inverted word order occurs. An English sentence like "I will go downtown tomorrow " will become "Tomorrow will I downtown go ", in German.
3. Nouns, articles, and possessive adjectives are declined.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. The **TH** sound does not occur in German.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** will usually be replaced by **S**.
think > sink
 - b. Voiced initial **TH** will usually be replaced by **Z**.
that > zat
2. **W** has the sound of **V** in German.
want > vant
3. The letter **S** is difficult for Germans.
 - a. **S** before a vowel becomes **Z**.
so > zo
 - b. **S** followed by **P**, **T**, or **L** becomes **SH**.
spell > shpell; step > shtep; sleep > shleep
4. When **B**, **D**, or **G** occur at the end of an English word, the ESL student will usually use **P**, **T**, or **K** respectively.
cab > cap; bad > bat; bag > back
5. The **R** sound can be difficult. In German, the **R** is made at the back of the throat and has a "growled" sound.

HINDI

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Hindi uses a non-Roman script alphabet.
2. Hindi is written and read from left to right.
3. Various letters/sounds in the Hindi alphabet have no English equivalents.
4. Sentences are written with the subject first, sentence parts in the middle, and the verb last.
5. Helping verbs such as "to be" are not usually used in Hindi.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. Voiced and voiceless **TH** becomes **T**.
three > tree; think > tink
2. The sound **P** is replaced by **B**.
pig > big
3. The sound **W** becomes **V**.
want > vant
4. The sound **CH** becomes **SH**.
cheep > sheep
5. Final consonants are often omitted, especially the **G** from **NG**.
doing > doin
6. Short vowel sounds cause much difficulty, since the ESL student does not hear the slight variations.
7. The consonants **F**, **Q**, **V**, **X**, and **Z** do not exist as separate characters in the Hindi alphabet.

HMONG

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. The alphabet uses Roman letters, and is written and read from left to right.
2. There are seven voice tones in Hmong. These voice tones give meaning and expression to the words in the language.
3. Usually only the present tense is used.
4. Nouns are not pluralized. The quantitative word before the noun indicates the plural idea. One girl, two girl, many girl.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. Initial **B** and **P** have the same sound.
bad > bad; pad > bad
2. The **TH** sound causes difficulty.
 - a. Initial voiceless **TH** becomes **T**.
think > tink
 - b. Initial voiced **TH** becomes **D**.
that > dat
3. The sound of **T** in the middle of a word will become **D**.
better > bedder
4. The consonants **P**, **T**, and **K** in the final position are replaced with **B**, **D**, and **G** respectively, and become voiced.
hip > hib; hit > hid; sick > sig

HUNGARIAN

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. The sentence word order is basically the same as in English.
2. The Roman alphabet is used.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. Some Hungarian vowel sounds have no English equivalents.
2. There is no sound for **W** in Hungarian. It is replaced with a **V** sound.
want > vant
3. The letter **J** has a **Y** sound.
January > Yanuary
4. The **TH** sound causes difficulty in Hungarian.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** becomes **S** or **T**.
think > sink or tink
 - b. Voiced initial **TH** becomes **Z** or **D**.
that > zat or dat
5. The letter **R** is trilled or rolled.

JAPANESE

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Japanese uses three writing systems. Two sets of characters are used for most written material and are written in vertical columns read from right to left.

The third system is written horizontally and read from left to right. It is phonetic and is used for adding foreign words to the language.

2. In Japanese, the subject is generally followed by other sentence parts, and the verb is last (subject, object, verb).

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. The letter **C** may be pronounced as **SH**.
cent > shent
2. The sound **W** is replaced by **V**.
want > vant
3. Initial **V** becomes **B**.
vine > bine
4. The **TH** sound does not occur in Japanese.
 - a. Initial voiceless **TH** becomes **S**.
think > sink
 - b. Initial voiced **TH** becomes **D**.
these > dese
 - c. Final **TH** becomes **S**.
with > wis
5. The **L** sound is usually replaced by an **R** type sound.
led > red

KOREAN

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Korean is related to Chinese and Japanese, but it has its own alphabet.
2. Traditionally Korean was written and read vertically; the more modern style is horizontal.
3. In a Korean sentence, the order is generally subject, other sentence parts, and the verb last. The word order in English is usually subject, verb, and object(s).

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. The **TH** sound does not occur in Korean.
 - a. Initial **TH** becomes **D**.
think > dink; that > dat
 - b. Final voiceless **TH** is replaced with **S**.
with > wis
 - c. Final voiced **TH** becomes **D**.
smooth > smood
2. The sound **L** is usually replaced with an **R** sound.
led > red
3. The sound **B** becomes **V**.
bat > vat
4. The **J** sound becomes a **Z** sound.
jeep > zeep
5. The **H** or **WH** sounds become an **F** sound.
held > feld; white > fight

POLISH

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Nouns are feminine, masculine, or neuter; they are declined like Latin/German nouns.
2. Adjectives are also declined; they must agree in number and gender with the nouns.
3. There are three basic verb tenses; present, past, and future. Verbs are conjugated, so subject pronouns are not necessary.
4. There are no articles in Polish.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. In the initial position, the letter **J** will always sound like a **Y**.
January > Yanuary
2. There is no **TH** sound in Polish.
 - a. Initial voiceless **TH** can become **T** or **F**.
three > tree or free
 - b. Initial voiced **TH** usually becomes **D**.
that > dat
 - c. Final **TH** can be replaced by **S** or **T**.
with > wis or wit
3. The letter **W** becomes **V**.
want > vant
4. Since Polish has several sounds for **L**, it is hard for students to produce the English **L**.

PORTUGUESE

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Nouns are masculine, feminine, or neuter and are shown by the article and the ending on the noun.
2. Possessive pronouns and adjectives must agree in gender and number with the nouns they modify.
3. Descriptive adjectives usually follow the noun.
4. No helping verbs are used to form questions. Instead, the verb is placed in front of the subject (inverted).
5. All vowels are pronounced.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. **CH** will sound like **SH**.
cheep > sheep
2. The letter **H** is never pronounced.
3. Since Portuguese has many nasal sounds, this may cause the ESL student some problems in pronunciation.

RUSSIAN

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet.
2. Nouns have feminine, masculine, or neuter genders.
3. Nouns and adjectives are declined as in Latin/German. All nouns and adjectives must agree in gender and number.
4. There are fewer verb tenses in Russian than in English.
5. There are no articles in Russian.
6. The verb "to be" is almost never used in the present tense.
The car is red > car red.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. English short vowel sounds are very difficult.
2. There is no **TH** sound in Russian.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** becomes **S**.
think > sink
 - b. Voiced initial **TH** becomes **Z**.
that > zat
 - c. Voiceless final **TH** becomes **F**, **S**, **Z**, or **T**.
with > wif, wis, wiz, wit
 - d. Middle **TH** becomes **Z**.
father > fazer
3. There is no **W** sound in Russian. It is replaced by the **V** sound.
want > vant
4. The letter **R** is rolled or "growled" at the back of the throat.
5. A hard **G** sound replaces the letter **H** in foreign words.
Ohio > Ogio

SPANISH

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Usually descriptive adjectives follow the nouns they modify.
2. Adjectives and articles must agree in gender and number with the nouns they modify.
3. There is no neuter in Spanish. Since the word "car" is masculine, its corresponding pronoun is "he." Since the word "pen" is feminine, its corresponding pronoun is "she."
4. In a question or an exclamation, the punctuation both precedes AND follows the statement: ¡ . . ! ¿ . . ?
5. All vowels are pronounced.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. There are no voiceless consonant blends beginning with "S"; consequently, an "e" sound will precede these blends.
street > estreet; school > eschool
2. There is no SH sound. It becomes CH.
shoe > choe
3. The letters **R** and **RR** are formed in the front of the mouth and are trilled.
4. The letter **H** has no sound. The letter **J** always carries the **H** sound as does **G** before the vowels **E** or **I**.
5. The sound **TH** exists in Spanish, but the letters **TH** are never used together. **D** will have the **TH** sound wherever possible in a Spanish sentence. In Spanish, **Z** and **C** (before **E** or **I**) carry the sound **TH**.
6. In many cases **V** will sound like a soft **B** sound.
have > hab

TAGALOG (FILIPINO)

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. 300 years of Spanish control had an effect on the language. It is written and read horizontally from left to right, and it uses the Roman alphabet.
2. The sentence structure resembles English.
3. Tagalog uses three tenses - present, past, and future.
4. ESL students may be able to pronounce English well and quickly, even though their comprehension may still be poor.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. The letter **V** has a **B** sound.
vest > best; vat > bat
2. The letter **J** has a **Y** sound.
jam > yam
3. **S** and **Z** have the **S** sound.
zip > sip; zebra > sebra
4. All words ending in **TAIN** have the same sound as the ending of the word "maintain."
fountain > fountain
5. The **TH** sound is difficult.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** sounds like **T**.
think > tink
 - b. Voiced initial **TH** sounds like **D**.
these > dese
 - c. Final **TH** sounds like **T**.
tooth > toot
6. The letter **F** has a **P** sound.
fan > pan

THAI

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. In Thai, a script-like alphabet is used instead of the Roman alphabet. Writing and reading are done from left to right.
2. There are five voice tones in the Thai language; each tone changes the meaning of the word.
3. Nouns have no plural forms. This concept is conveyed, instead, through the use of quantitative words which follow the nouns.
six pencils > pencil six; two children > child two
4. Adjectives follow nouns.
5. There is no apostrophe. An "of" phrase shows possession.
My mother's hat > the hat of my mother.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. Voiced final consonants in English are omitted. Multiple final consonant clusters are impossible.
2. Voiceless consonant blends at the beginning of English words are difficult. ESL students will tend to voice them.
stop > sadop; spend > sabend
3. The **TH** sound does not exist in the Thai language.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** becomes **T**.
three > tree
 - b. Voiced initial **TH** becomes **D**.
that > dat
 - c. Voiceless final **TH** becomes **T**.
with > wit
4. The letter **V** has a **W** sound.
visit > wisit
5. The letters **R** and **L** are interchanged because they sound the same.
free > flee; fly > fry
6. **CH** sounds like **SH**.
cheep > sheep

TURKISH

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. The Roman alphabet is used in Turkish.
2. Writing and reading are done from left to right.
3. Turkish and English have many similar consonant sounds. There are very few difficulties in this area.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. There are no initial consonant clusters in Turkish. The most difficult to learn are those beginning with **S**. ESL students will insert a vowel before or after the **S**.
store > istore or sitore
2. The **TH** sound does not occur in Turkish.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** becomes **S** or **T**.
thin > sin or tin
 - b. Voiced **TH** becomes **Z** or **D**.
that > zat or dat
3. The letters **V** and **W** are confusing. **V** is especially difficult to produce before vowels. **W** is replaced by **oo** as in noon.
white > ooite
4. Words ending in **B**, **D**, or **G** will be substituted with **P**, **T**, or **K** respectively.
nab > nap; lid > lit; pig > pik
5. Where **P**, **T**, or **K** occur in the middle of a word, **B**, **D**, or **G** will be substituted.
dipper > dibber; butter > budder; bicker > bigger

VIETNAMESE

A. SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

1. Vietnamese differs from many Asian languages because it uses the Roman alphabet, and it is written and read from left to right.
2. There are six voice tones in the Vietnamese language, and all words are monosyllabic.
3. Vietnamese is patterned like Spanish and Portuguese in syntax, vowel usage, and word order; adjectives follow nouns.
4. There are no plural noun endings.

B. POSSIBLE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES

1. Pronunciation may be choppy for ESL students because the English language has so many words of more than one syllable.
2. The **TH** sound is difficult.
 - a. Voiceless initial **TH** can become **T** or **S**.
think > tink or sink
 - b. Voiced initial **TH** can become **Z**.
that > zat
3. **CH** has the **Sh** sound.
cheep > sheep
4. The **L** can have the sound of **R**.
load > road
5. The letter **D** is confusing. It may be replaced by **J**, **Y**, or **Z**.
dig > zig; jig > yig or zig