

RICHARD W. HOWELL
(Hilo, University of Hawaii)

/r/ Z N THE HOOD

The concept of “hood” or “neighborhood” has both geographical and phonological relevance for realizations of the Japanese phoneme /r/. With rare, idiosyncratic, exceptions the realizations do *not* include an [l]. Typically the /r/ is rendered as a flap, like the single *r* in Spanish *pero*, ‘but’. The full range of articulation begins with a relatively unobstructed sound that is about the same as the initial *r* in the speech of most Americans. It is rarely encountered in ordinary speech but is sometimes heard in the lyric *Nō* dramas, where sounds may be quite protracted.

The /r/ may also be trilled, usually as a feature of the macho *beranmē* style often heard in blue-collar drinking establishments. Where there is hostility the trill may be extreme. A consistently short trill seems to mark neighborhood identity in the Tawaramachi district of Tokyo (Howell 1993).

In rapid casual speech the /r/ may be deleted, but more than a century ago Aston (1889) was dealing with the honorific *gozarimasu* as more or less interchangeable with *gozaimasu* (the only form commonly heard today). And in casual speech the *r* can assimilate to a following *n* after deletion of the intervening vowel, as in *wakannai* for *wakaranai*, ‘I don’t understand’. Sir George Sansom (1943) derives *sarugaku*, ‘monkey music’ from the older *sangaku* precursor to *Nō*, in which comic elements once predominated. But this is not the *r/n* assimilation in reverse; more likely it represents a bit of wordplay.

While realizations of the phoneme /r/ do not include an *l*, the *l* sounds in loanwords are realized as *r* in Japanese.

The first and most lasting influence of this sort was from Chinese, to which Japanese is indebted for its initial liquid. This was a fairly straightforward matter, with the Chinese initial *l*- becoming Japanese *r*-, but in some cases the *r* was palatalized. This was usually in rendering Chinese *liang* or *liao*, each of which has many meanings (more than a dozen for the former and at least two dozen for the latter), depending on the tone and other factors. In some cases it may not be immediately apparent why the *r* was palatalized. Thus Chinese *lung* “dragon” is Japanese *ryū*, where we might expect *rō*, as in

the rendering of *lung* 'cage'. But Karlgren (1940) says the 'dragon' used to be palatalized, while the 'cage' apparently was not. Nor is the Sino-Korean 'cage' palatalized, though the 'dragon' is.

The next serious period of alien influence began in the middle of the 16th century with the arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch (Miller's 1967 chapter on loanwords remains helpful), but for our purposes events get more interesting from the middle of the 19th century. That is when the Americans arrived with an offer the Japanese authorities could not refuse, and the massive Westernization of Japan was under way. One of the least significant Western influences was the apparent differentiation of *l* and *r* in certain loan words.

First of all, the *l* is *always* represented in loans from American, British and continental European languages, at least when it is pronounced in those languages. Thus *walky-talky* has unpronounced *l* and becomes *uōkī-tōkī*. On the other hand, *r* is always represented except when preconsonantal or final in loans from English. Thus the French name Charles becomes Sharuru, but the English name Charles becomes Charusu. And Miller (1967) has noted that Japanese *biiru* is from the Dutch *bier* but *biyahōru* is from English *beer hall*. In general preconsonantal and final *r* in loans from English are represented by an [a]. So *sutōru* is 'stole', the neckpiece still worn by some women and *sutoa* is 'store'.

The English model was evidently "r-less" except in initial position or intervocally. New York speech fits the model, but it is a stigmatized variety; some New England speech also fits the model, but it is not particularly prestigious and is used by outsiders mainly to effect imitations of Kennedy family speech. Southern varieties seem mostly to inspire non-southern actors and actresses. The obvious model for the Japanese, then, seems to have been the so-called "received pronunciation" of British English.

It is not clear exactly when and how British, as against American, linguistic influence was established. The Americans may have got there first but the British were not far behind. (The Dutch had been there for well over two centuries, but were basically restricted to Dejima, now part of Nagasaki City.) The American Plenipotentiary arrived in 1856 and his British counterpart, Sir Rutherford Alcock, assumed his post three years later. By mid-1861 the four open ports accommodated fewer than 200 Western residents and a majority of these (126) were in the Kanagawa community and included 55 British and 38 Americans. One way or the other, the English reading public,

including many transients from military and commercial vessels, was great enough to induce the British merchant A.W. Hansard to launch *The Japan Herald* in Edo (now Tokyo), in November of 1861 (Alcock 1863, 2:329-330).

By 1876 there were 3994 foreign residents in Japan, including 2255 Chinese and 1017 English and Americans. The vast majority (2418) were in Yokohama, with another 113 in Tokyo (*Nihon Teikoku Tōkei Nenkan* 1. 1882:73-78).

In the meanwhile the so-called Meiji Restoration had taken place (1868) and a new government was making radical changes to cope with the West. Thus in 1871 the Iwakura Mission was sent on a two-year visit to America and Europe. Kume Kunitake chronicled the adventure in remarkable detail, inadvertently providing hints on the //r issue.

Kume indicated the *l* as well as the initial and intervocalic *r* about as we would expect today, but when he spells out “water closet” in kana he does represent the final *-r* of “water”: *uōtoru kurosetto*. The initials W. C. suffice in Japan today, but plain “water” is *uōtā* and “watercolor” is *uōtakara*, that is, no final *-r* in either case. Kume spells “commodore” as *komodoru*, with the final *-r*.

Of course it matters whether one gets his model in written or spoken form, and one wonders at his rendition of some of the Spanish place names in the San Francisco area. San Jose, for instance becomes *san jōsu*, so he was probably, guessing on the basis of the spelling, though we cannot be certain. Most of the locals today, at least in casual speech, would sound pretty close to the current Japanese *sannoze*. Kume does not explain how he decided on the pronunciation of the names and terms he renders into *kana*.

At any event, those were still the days of the British Empire and the early years of contact coincided with the period when Americans tried most seriously to sort out their north-south differences.

For whatever reason, it seems that the British provided the model for the treatment of the *r*, and a Japanese bias in favor of British English was still evident in the 1950s and 1960s, though in recent years instructors of almost any English-speaking persuasion have been acceptable in Japan.

In some ways it was rather handy to have the *r* handled differently from the *l*. The author of a cartoon book, for example, was Miller, a name which looks as if it could be English, but the *kana* rendering was *mīreru* rather than **maira(a)*, and the man was a Czech. A travel agency in Tokyo that was run

by a Japanese woman was Air Voyages, but the *kana* for the first word was *ēru*, not *ea*, and it turns out she is married to a Frenchman, who suggested the name of the agency.

A possible portent of things to come may be heralded by the recent appearance of such names as the Hitachi Chain *sutōru*, in which the meaning of 'store' seems unmistakable, and thus replaces the British final [a] with the American *r*.

In general, the [l]/[r] "problem" is mainly a concern for people involved directly and indirectly with language teaching (and learning), particularly for those involved in programs for the teaching of English (or another tongue) as a foreign language. This is abundantly attested by a veritable mountain of literature reporting high tech and other research results over the past twenty years or more. In some cases the research has involved the manipulation of synthetic speech not only for adults (Miyawaki et.al. 1975) but even for two- and three- month old infants (Eimas 1975). Gibbon and others (1991) are exploring the uses of electropalatography, an instrumental technique for showing the timing and location of tongue contacts with the hard palate during speech. Perhaps even more exotically, Buchwald et al. (1994) measured electrophysiological responses to *l* and *r* stimuli, discovering that discrimination of the two sounds is much more difficult for Japanese than for native speakers of English and concludes that the structure of language seems to influence the development of the brain and ensuing behavior. Such measures sound a little desperate for what is a relatively minor problem, but eventually they may enhance our general understanding of the linguistic process.

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