

By: William Conway

## An Approach To The [ɪ] [i] Contrast \*

Lesson one is directed towards Polynesian students who have difficulty in recognizing and producing the contrast between [ɪ] and [i] (see International Phonetic Alphabet). The basic premise of the lesson is that a student must learn to recognize a sound before he can produce it.

### Lesson 1:

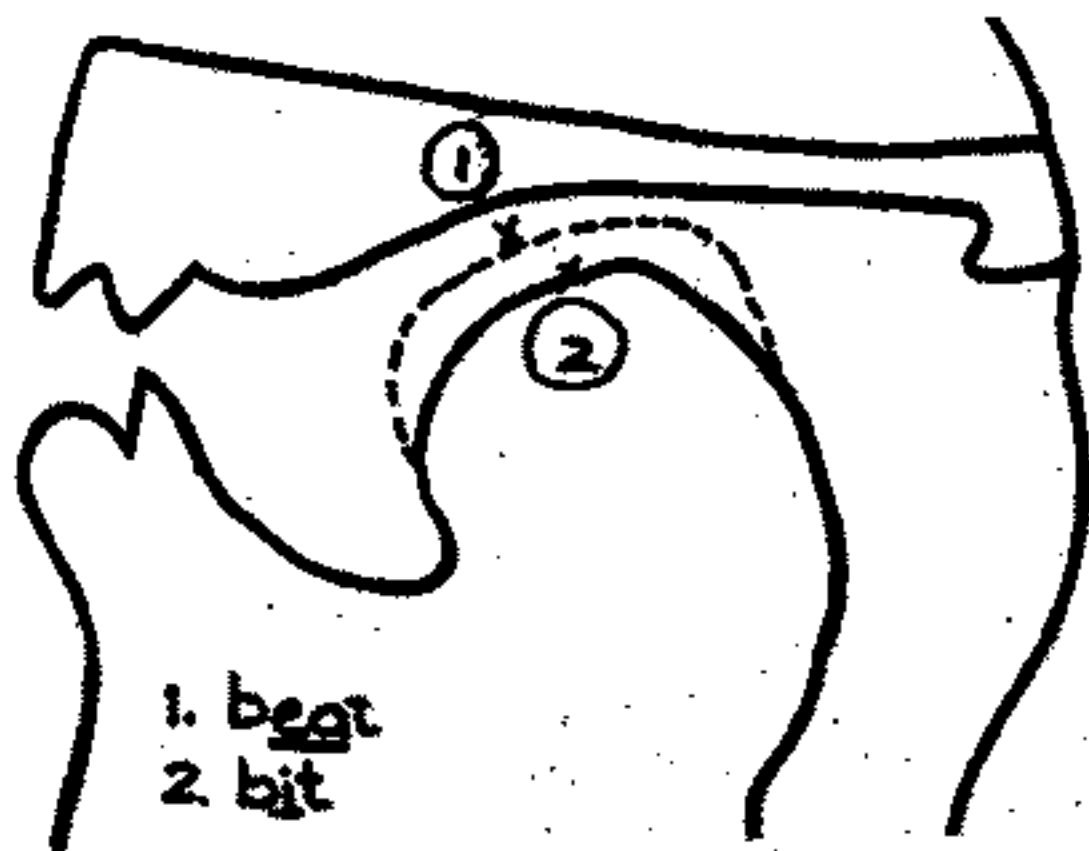
1. Pronounce "pick" and "peak" several times. Show pictures of the two objects to emphasize the fact that two different meanings are involved.

2. Place two columns of words on the board. Those in column A should be known sounds and those in column B the new sound. Read all the words in column A and then in column B before reading them in pairs to emphasize the contrast.

A	B
ease	is
sleep	slip
eat	it
leave	live
beat	bit
feet	fit

3. Describe the new sound. Emphasize the difference in tenseness and the height of the tongue. Use the teacher as an audio-visual aid. Demonstrate the change in facial feature and show the position of the tongue. The latter can be done with a pen or pencil. Further

develop the student's concept through the use of an articulation diagram. See Fig. 1



(Fig. 1)

4. Repeat the minimal pair contrasts used in step 2. If the students seem to recognize the difference in the sounds, go on to step 5; if not, repeat steps 2 and 3.

5. Recognition Exercises: Utilize the two columns of minimal pairs previously placed on the blackboard. Use the following three exercises in the order given; leave out B if it proves too complicated for the students.

a. Same or Different: Repeat a minimal pair contrast or the same twice, asking the students to say "same" or "different." For example: ease/ease, ease/is

b. Same or different with three words: Ask the students to identify which two of three words are the same. Use hand signals or the numbers 1, 2, 3. Bit, bit, beat would be a 1, 2 sequence. As a variation ask the students to identify the one of the three that is different; this seems easier to handle and explain with some groups.

c. A or B? Referring once again to the minimal pairs on the black-

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\* This is the first of a series of lesson plans that will be featured in the TESL Reporter. Mr. Conway is the director of the English Language Institute at the Church College of Hawaii with four years of TESL experience here in Hawaii and in American Samoa. Manuscripts for this feature are needed. Submit your favorite for consideration.

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board, repeat the words and ask the students to indicate which column a word is from. Mix up the sequence in such a way that the student must depend upon his knowledge of the sound rather than the pattern. Experiment by turning your back to the class; some students recognize the change in this pair through the external change in the mouth position. The student may signal his choice through hand signals or by giving the letter above each column.

#### 6. Production

**Exercise A:** Referring to the two columns of words once again, direct the students to repeat the word in column B -- the new form -- when you say a word in column A. In addition, if you say the word in column B the student should simply repeat the word.

**Exercise B:** Model the words once more and have the students repeat after you. Now ask them to repeat the pairs to a neighbor who will in turn attempt to say them back.

#### Justification For The Approach

Minimal pairs are an excellent teaching device because they illustrate the phonemic system of the target language, the contrast used by the native speaker to distinguish different words.

Steps 1-4 are necessary to develop in the student's recognition of the sound. Once he can recognize the difference he has the foundation for learning to produce the sound. To the young Samoan student "eat" and "it" will sound identical until his ear is trained.

The use of a picture in step one and also in step two (where possible) will help to develop the student's concept of the differing meaning of

the two words. He must be convinced of the importance of the difference or it may not seem worth learning.

In step 4 the tense/lax condition of the mouth and the height of the tongue are the only two features that can readily be described and taught to the student. The picture helps to get the point across, particularly to those students that only understand part of what the teacher says.

The student's skill in recognizing these sounds must be developed before production can be expected, hence the fifth step. All three exercises require the student to listen closely and carefully. The game-like element of this exercise is attractive to the students. These exercises give the teacher an accurate measure of the student's readiness to go on to production.

Exercise A in the sixth step gives the student opportunity to repeat the new form in a variety of circumstances that will keep him interested and develop his skill in production. (It would be well to preface this exercise by class concert recitation of the minimal pairs.) Exercise 6A gradually makes the student less dependent upon the teacher as a model.

Exercise B takes the student completely away from his model, the teacher. He now has an opportunity to practice--to produce--what he has been learning. His study partner can also be of some assistance if problems still exist.

#### Possible Weaknesses

The minimal pairs introduce -c endings which are not found in Samoan. None of the consonants used in the exercise are new to the student; all are found in his own language.

The student needs more work on production, particularly in phrases and in sentences. This doesn't seem possible in a 15 minute lesson.