

MAY 2011

♦ A RIOT OF RHOTICS ♦

Rrrrrreally! Linguists call “r” sounds “rhotics,” and though we English speakers -- whether Brits or Amurricans -- use only one “r,” many languages have several. Bulgarian, Swedish, Norwegian, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Dutch use what are called trilled rhotics. The stereotyped Scottish rolled “r” is well-known, too. Spanish has both a single and a double “r,” so be careful that you don’t use *perro* [“dog”] with a double-r called a trill, when you mean *pero* [“but”] with a single “r” called a tap. In Czech, “ř” with a hacek over it -- as in the name of the famous composer Antonin Dvořak -- is called a fricative trill and pronounced like the sounds for “h” as in hot, “r” as in red and “zh” as in Asia -- all at once! Want to try it? The Czech word for spelling out 333 (třístatřicetři) can be heard here: <http://www.forvo.com/word/t%C5%99istat%C5%99icett%C5%99i/>

In the Greek alphabet, characters for the 17th letter *rho* – **Ρ**, **ρ** and **ϱ** – are used internationally in math and science: for example, in physics, as the symbol for density or resistivity; in mathematics, as the symbol for radius and other coefficients; in molecular biology, as the Rho protein for the termination of RNA synthesis, etc. Former Rhodes Scholars are entitled to use the Greek letter *rho* as a designation of their status, the symbol preceding the name.



In most Asian languages, such as Japanese or Korean, the use of “R” is not distinguished from its lateral approximant brother, “L.”

♦ THIS MONTH'S HIGHLIGHT ♦

We recently provided a major television broadcaster with voiceover services in Japanese, Spanish, Swahili and Italian for various late-breaking news stories and interviews.



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♦ FEATURE ♦ Lingua Quiz!

- The “R” sound is
 - A consonant or a vowel.
 - Only a consonant
 - Only a vowel
 - An aspirant
- True or false:
 - Rs are dropped most commonly in New England (“Pahk your cah...”).
 - Rs are added intrusively in Baltimore (“Or in the Warshington/Philly area...”)
 - Rs are dropped in Brooklyn and the Bronx in NYC (“My fathuh latuh went to Toity-Toid St.”)
 - Rs are added intrusively in Brooklyn and the Bronx too (“I had no idear he sawr you today!”)

ANSWERS:

2 – All true!

1 – (a) R-colored vowels are rare, occurring in less than 1% of the world's languages but they include North American English, found e.g., in *butter*, *nurse* and, for some speakers, *start*) and Mandarin Chinese.