Project title:
Spontaneous Second Language Speech Corpus: Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Japanese Learners of English in Japan, Canada, the US and the UK

Objective:
My research team has been currently working on the development of second language (L2) spontaneous speech corpus by collecting a total number of 522 speech samples (as of April, 2017) from adult Japanese learners of English through the same task format—i.e., timed picture description task (see below). The main objective of the large-scale dataset is to examine how adult learners (age of acquisition > 16 years) with various experience levels (operationalized as length of residence: 0-41 years) produce various dimensions of L2 speech (segmentals, prosody, fluency, lexicogrammar).

Participants:
Since Summer 2009, a total of 522 Japanese learners of English in Japan ($n = 217$), Canada ($n = 210$), the US ($n = 65$) and the UK ($n = 30$) and 55 native speakers of English in Canada ($n = 30$), the US ($n = 15$), and the UK ($n = 10$) have participated. All the Japanese participants started learning English from secondary school (Grade 7); and demonstrated a wide range of experience abroad (ranging from 0 months to 41 years). For those in Canada, the US, and the UK, their age of arrival in an L2 speaking environment was beyond 16 years (ranging from 0 months to 40 years). In this regard, all the participants could be considered as "late bilinguals" whose language acquisition processes tend to be explicit rather than implicit.

To further examine the "quality" of the experienced Japanese participants' L2 use (length of residence > 1 month), they were also asked to rate the frequency of L2 use on a 6-point scale (1 = infrequent, 6 = very frequent), showing a great deal of individual variance (ranging from 1 to 6). Given that the Japanese population in the cities where we conducted data collection is relatively low (e.g., 0.06% in Quebec and 1% in British Columbia) (Statistics Canada, 2008), many participants indeed reported that their main language of communication at home/work was English rather than Japanese.

Speech task:
As adult L2 learners are known to monitor their accurate production when their speech is elicited via controlled tasks (e.g., word and sentence reading), we have adopted a timed picture description task which was designed to elicit a certain length of semi-structured, spontaneous speech samples without too many pauses and repetitions from even low-proficiency learners. In this task, the participants explained seven pictures, with three key words as hints for the content of each photo. To encourage the participants to speak under time pressure, they were provided only five seconds of planning time prior to each picture description. In this project, their speech is considered as "spontaneous" in that L2 learners are guided to produce language for meaning as a primary focus (i.e., describing photos) with their secondary focus on form (i.e., using language accurately and fluently). The first four (out of seven) pictures were just used to practice and get familiarized with the task procedure (the remaining three pictures were used for the final analyses). For the photos used in the corpus, please see *Appendix A*. All the relevant materials were deposited in the IRIS data bank (click here).

Relevant academic projects:

Based on the dataset, my research team has conducted various analyses according to the participants' different experience levels resulting in multiple publications. These studies include:

Foreign language learning (Length of residence: 0 months)
- Saito, K., & *Hanzawa, K. (2016). Developing second language oral ability in foreign language classrooms: The role of the length and focus of instruction and individual differences. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 37*, 813-840.

Initial stage of L2 speech learning (0.1-1 year)
- Saito, K., & Munro, M. (2014). The early phase of /r/ production development in adult Japanese learners of English. *Language and Speech, 57*, 451-469.

Interlanguage development (Length of residence: 1-13 years)
- Saito, K. (2015). Experience effects on the development of late second language learners' oral proficiency. *Language Learning, 65*, 563-595.
- Saito, K., & Brajot, F. (2013). Scrutinizing the role of length of residence and age of acquisition in the interlanguage pronunciation development of English /r/ by late Japanese bilinguals. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 16*, 847-863.

Ultimate attainment (Length of residence: 10-42 years)
- Saito, K. (2015). The role of age of acquisition in late second language oral proficiency attainment. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 37*, 713-743.
- Saito, K. (2013). Age effects on late bilingualism: The production development of /r/ by high-proficiency Japanese learners of English. *Journal of Memory and Language, 69*, 546-562.
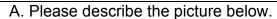
Future plans:

My research team has been expanding the size of the dataset by including not only Japanese learners of English in Japan (Tokyo, Osaka), Canada (Calgary) and the UK (London), but also other groups of L2 learners (we've collected from 50 Italian learners of English in London). We are also planning to feature not only late bilinguals (age of acquisition > 16 years) but also early bilinguals (age of acquisition < 16 years). Finally, we have recently begun to adopt not only timed picture description, but also other interview tasks where L2 learners are to talk about familiar topics with much freedom and room for conceptualization (e.g., IELTS long-turn task in *Appendix B*).

To cite:

Saito, K. (2017). "*Beginner, intermediate and advanced Japanese learners of English in Japan Canada, the US and the UK.*" Unpublished corpus of second language speech. Retrieved from http://kazuyasaito.net/

Appendix A: Example pictures used in Timed Picture Description (deposited in IRIS, click here)

A. Please describe the picture below.

Key words
"rain"
"table"
"drive way"

B. Please describe the picture below.

Key words
"three guys"
"guitar"
"rock music"

C. Please describe the picture below.

Key words
"blue sky"
"road"
"cloud"

Appendix B: Example questions in the interview task (similar to IELTS Long-turn)

Prompt A

Describe the most unforgettable trip you have ever made in your life.

Your story should start with the following words:

One of the most unforgettable trips ever was _____

➢ Discussion points
  ✓ Where? When? How old were you?
  ✓ Why did you visit that place? Why was that trip so unforgettable (e.g., food, people, scenery)?

Prompt B

Describe the hardest and toughest challenge in your life (e.g., entrance exams, sports competition).

Your story should start with the following words:

One of the hardest/toughest challenges in my life was _____

➢ Discussion points
  ✓ When? How old and where were you?
  ✓ Why did you encounter this challenge?
  ✓ Why was it so challenging?
  ✓ Did anybody (e.g., friends, parents) help you?

References:

Statistics Canada. (2008). *2006 Census of Canada topic based tabulations, ethnic origin and visible minorities tables: Ethnic origin, for population, for Canada, provinces and territories, 2006 census.* (Catalogue number 97-562-XWE2006002). Retrieved June 3, 2012 from Statistics Canada: http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/hlt/97-562/index.cfm?Lang=E

Picture A (http://fireflyforest.net/images/firefly/2005/August/rain-on-table-480.jpg)
Picture B (http://fuelfriends.blogspot.co.uk/2006_03_01_archive.html)
Picture C (http://all-free-download.com/free-photos/download/the_avenida_original_definition_picture_165987.html)