

May 18th

ETJ Tokyo Workshop

Researching Second Language Oral Proficiency

The main aim of this presentation is to provide a state of the art review on teaching second language (L2) speaking, and provide some practical advice on how to conduct classroom research especially based on my relevant experience. Topics to be covered include (a) "ideal" learning goals that many foreign language learners (e.g., Japanese learners of English) typically have; (b) "realistic" learning goals that researchers, drawing on empirical evidence, actually suggest; (c) a list of crucial pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar features directly affecting perceived intelligibility and comprehensibility at beginner, intermediate and advanced proficiency levels; and (d) recommended methods to teach these features in an effective and efficient way. In particular, I would like to introduce three studies of which I have firsthand experience.

These projects are:

1. Measuring Important Linguistic Influences on L2 Oral Proficiency:

I analyzed what kinds of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar errors interact to affect the way native speakers perceive comprehensibility (ease of understanding) and accentedness (linguistic nativelikeness). The data constitute 120 Japanese learners of English with a wide range of L2 proficiency who provided spontaneous speaking samples for 20 listeners with and without teaching experience to make impressionistic judgment.

2. The Pedagogical Potential and Limit of Foreign Language Learning:

My research team at Waseda is taking a longitudinal approach towards investigating the extent to which, and in what way, one academic year of foreign language classroom experience can facilitate L2 oral proficiency development by 40 first-year Japanese college students who enrolled in intensive (11 hours per week) and extensive (3 hours per week) English lessons.

3. Teaching Second Language Speaking:

I examined how integrating form-focused instruction into meaning-oriented classrooms can impact the development of L2 speaking perception and production skills by conducting several classroom intervention studies with more than 100 ESL and EFL students in Canada and Japan.

Dr Kazuya Saito is Assistant Professor of English in the School of Commerce at Waseda University in Japan. His program of research investigates how instruction and corrective feedback can help adult learners develop their L2 oral proficiency, especially in the domains of pronunciation, listening, vocabulary, and grammar. His publications in both academic journals and instructional resources can be downloaded from his website (<http://www.f.waseda.jp/kazuya.saito/eng.home.html>).