Effects of Instruction on the Development of Intelligible Pronunciation in Japanese EFL Classrooms: What and how to teach?

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Organization

(1) Background

(2) What to teach?
  • Which pronunciation features are relatively important to attain L2 comprehensibility and intelligibility?

(3) How to teach?
  • How should we help L2 students achieve such comprehensible pronunciation in the most effective/efficient manner?
Overview: How to conceptualize, define and measure L2 pronunciation (since 1990)?

Tracey Derwing  Murray Munro  Jennifer Jenkins  John Levis  James Flege
Adult L2 speech learning: Review

Many L2 learners perceive attaining “nativelike pronunciation” as an idealized goal (especially in EFL classrooms).

Many scholars have questioned whether “nativelikeness” actually matters in real-life situations…

(e.g., Derwing, 2003 for ESL; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011 for EFL)
Adult L2 speech learning: Review

English continues to serve as a *lingua franca* in many academic and business settings all over the world.

Most of the English users are actually non-native speakers.

(e.g., Jenkins, 2002; Levis, 2005)
Adult L2 speech learning: Review

Few non-native speakers demonstrate perfect proficiency in all aspects of L2 (like monolinguals do).

Many successful non-native speakers can be accented but highly comprehensible.

(e.g., Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2009; Flege, Munro, & MacKay, 1995)
Adult L2 speech learning: Review

It is important to set a realistic goal for adult L2 speech learning.

Nativelikness vs. Comprehensibility

(e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2009; Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2012; Jenkins, 2002)
What kinds of methods do L2 speech researchers generally use?
1. Eliciting ESL students’ extemporaneous speech

- Please explain an eight-frame cartoon below:

  (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 1997)

- Please explain each photo below:

  (e.g., Saito, 2015)
2. Native and non-native listeners rate accetedness and comprehensibility
9-point Scale

- **Accentedness (nativelikeness)**
  - 1 2 3 (Nativelike: Little)
  - 4 5 6
  - 7 8 9 (Heavily accented: Strong)

- **Comprehensibility**
  - 1 2 3 (Easy to understand: High)
  - 4 5 6
  - 7 8 9 (Hard to understand: Low)
Derwing & Munro (2009) in *Language Teaching*

Accentendess and comprehensibility are “partially independent constructs” (p. 488)
Pedagogical implications for pronunciation teaching (Levis, 2005)

Nativeness Principle (traditional approach)
- Focusing equally on all pronunciation features in a L2
- To become “nativelike”

Intelligibility Principle (new approach)
- Focusing selectively on certain features affecting comprehensibility/intelligibility
- To become “comprehensible”/”intelligible”
Key references


Question

• Which pronunciation problems are relatively affecting successful comprehensibility? Which pronunciation features should be taught as a priority in Japanese EFL classrooms?
Specific pronunciation problems

- Segmental errors
  - “road” mispronounced as “load”

- Syllable errors
  - Play “pleɪ” mispronounced as “pəleɪ”

- Word stress errors
  - “guiTAR” mispronounced as “GUItar”

- Intonation errors
  - “Can you see it? There are three guys on the stage.”
Teachers’ opinions


Saito & van Poeteren (2012), Saito (2014)

**Participants?**
- 120 experienced teachers (> 10 yrs of teaching)

**Method?**
- Questionnaire/interview

**Findings?**
1. Major segmentals /l, ɹ, ð, θ, v/
2. Syllable-related problems [schwa vowel insertion]
3. Assimilation /si, ʃi, ti/
4. Stress/Intonation [sentence/lexical stress, intonation]
5. Secondary segmentals /æ, ʌ, f/
Listeners’ judgements
Suzukida & Saito (under review)

Participants?
• 40 Japanese learners with varied L2 English proficiency (LOR = 0-40 years in Canada)

Method?
• Their extemporaneous speech (30sec per token) first judged for “perceived comprehensibility” and then acoustically analyzed for “segmental, syllabic and prosodic accuracy”
ANOVA (1 = good, 9 = poor)

Low (6.2-8.4)
- High FL segmentals
- Syllable (vowel insertion)

Mid (3.6-6.0)
- High FL segmentals
- Syllable (vowel insertion)

High (1.5-3.3)
- Syllable (vowel insertion)
- Low FL segmentals
- Prosody (word stress, intonation)
Question

• How should we teach L2 pronunciation? Any thoughts for an optimal method (based on research/anecdotal stories)?

✓ Explicit phonetic instruction?
✓ Contextualized usage of language?
✓ Fun and meaningful activities?
✓ Useful online tools?
Explicit phonetic instruction

Option 1. Perception training

- Let students hear the acoustic features of target sounds via minimal pair pair activities!

"Rock" vs. "Lock"?

"Read" vs. "Lead"?
Web Materials: English Accent Coach

Explicit phonetic instruction

Option 2. Articulation training

- Let students understand the articulatory features of target sounds!
Web Materials: Iowa Uni Phonetic Lab

http://soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/english/english.html

This site contains animated libraries of the phonetic sounds of English, German, and Spanish. Available for each consonant and vowel is an animated articulatory diagram, a step-by-step description, and video-audio of the sound spoken in context. It is intended for students of phonetics, linguistics, and foreign languages. There is also an interactive diagram of the articulatory anatomy.

Now Available!!!

English Sounds of Speech Mobile App

Android
Google Play Store

Revenue from purchases are used to support further development of this application.

iOS
Apple iTunes Store

(If you bought the Android version prior to Jan 2nd 2014 and would like an update to the newest version please contact us at uiuf@uiowa.edu)
Audiolingual teaching methods vs. L2 pronunciation development
Research Evidence

Mcdonald, Power, & Yule (1994)
- 23 ESL learners
- 10 key lexical items

Elliott (1997)
- 66 English learners of Spanish
- 19 Spanish allophones

Saito (2011)
- 20 Japanese learners of English
- 5 English-specific segmentals (including English /r/ and /l/)

Improvement was clear at a controlled-speech level but not at a spontaneous-speech level

(See also Saito, 2012 for research synthesis)
Key references

Contextualized Instruction to teach L2 pronunciation!


Design ($N = 100+$)

- Pre-tests

Four 1-hour meaning oriented sessions with **communicative** focus on English /r/ form

- Post-tests
Communicative Tasks & Recasts

**Main Activities**

Theme: “Developing a convincing argument”

1. How to critique?
2. English Debating
3. Argument-creation and Public Speech

**Warm-up Games**

4. English Karuta (noticing activities)
5. Guessing Game (awareness activities)
6. English Card Game (awareness activities)
English Debating
“Running inside is better than running outside”
Excerpt 2

S: In spite of winter weather, I can see runners in Montreal.

T: Runners.

S: Runners. So, we can get on coat, sweater, more clothes. If you run..

T: Run

S: If you run, you get warm so you will take care of weather.
Topics for debate activities

• Which would you prefer, eating rice vs. bread for breakfast?

• Listening to rock music is not good for children

• Is it good to have a rainy day?”

• Is a sense of “rat race” among students good (e.g., tests, entrance examinations)?
English Karuta
English KARUTA

Please pick up the card I am reading!

L

R

CL

CR
Excerpt 3

T: “Race”
S1: Yes.
T: No…
S1: Ohh
S2: This one!
T: Yes! What is this?
S2: Race [lace]*
T: Race
S2: Race
Results

Trained items
\[ M = 62.4 \rightarrow 68.9\% \ (6.5\% \text{ gain}) \]

Untrained items
\[ M = 57.7 \rightarrow 67.7\% \ (10\% \text{ gain}) \]

- The amount of improvement resulting from 4 hr of FFI (6-10\% gain) could be comparable to other intensive lab training studies (e.g., Logan et al., 1992, for 8\% gain after 10 hr of training). (p. 25)
Results

Production
Neither /r/ nor /l/ → Good/probably /r/ at controlled and spontaneous speech tests

• A communitive focus on form could be an optimal method to allow students to automatize their new phonetic knowledge.
Key references (FonF in L2 grammar)

**FonF**

**Corrective feedback (reactive FonF)**
Conclusion

Teaching adult Japanese learners to improve comprehensibility in English
Set a realistic goal!

- It is important to set a realistic goal:
  - “comprehensibility” (using L2 as a non-native speaker) rather than “nativelikeness” (mastering L2 like a native speaker)

- Make sure (a) where students currently are; and (b) what they ultimately aim at:

  Beginner-level Comp  Intermediate-level Comp  Advanced-level Comp
What to teach?

Beginner-level Comp

Intermediate-level Comp

Advanced-level Comp

Initial Stage of L2 Speech Learning
- High FL segmentals
- Syllables (schwa vowel insertion)

Later Stage of L2 Speech Learning
- Low FL segmentals
- Syllables
- Prosody (word stress, intonation)
How to teach?

Explicit instruction
  • Articulatory explanation
  • Perceptual training

Communicative activities
  • Focused tasks
  • Input enhancement
  • Recasts
THANK YOU!!