

ISSN 0910-500X

英文學思潮

THOUGHT CURRENTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOLUME XCI

2018

THE ENGLISH LITERARY SOCIETY
OF
AOYAMA GAKUIN UNIVERSITY

青山学院大学英文学会

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Theoretical and Practical Accounts for Learning Difficulties in Phonetic and Phonological Acquisition: Perceptual Influence on Language Factors for Japanese Learners of English

Kenichi Ohyama

要旨

本論文では、第二言語・外国語習得論に焦点を当て、英語学習者においてどのような要因が音声学的な困難さとして考えられるのかを理論的にまた実践的に提唱することが目的である。特に音声・音韻習得論 (Phonetic and Phonological Acquisition) において、英語を第二言語または外国語として学習している場を想定しなくてはならない。しかしながら、母語が英語とどのような違いがあるのかという対照分析 (Contrastive Analysis) の考慮がされていなかった。そのため、理論的な枠組みがどのように実践的な枠組みと結び付くのかを検証する先行研究が多い。日本人を英語学習者と見据えた場合、日本語と英語における音声学的・音韻論的な類似点や相違点は調べられてきたが、日本語に似ていても習得が困難な音声現象や、日本語とは違っていても習得が容易な音声現象が存在している。このような一定とならない検証結果には、第二言語・外国語習得論による考察が必要である。理論的な考察に加えて、教育音声学 (Pedagogical Phonetics) を基にした実践的な考察も明示する必要性があると考えられる。

キーワード：音声・音韻習得論，第二言語習得論，外国語習得論，英語音声学，教育音声学

Keywords: Phonetic and Phonological Acquisition, Second Language Acquisition, Foreign Language Acquisition, English Phonetics, Pedagogical Phonetics

1. Purpose

This paper proposes what kinds of phonetic elements are regarded as learning difficulties by English learners theoretically and practically based on the second and foreign language acquisition. English is one of the target languages to learn as a second language or a foreign one in terms of phonetic and phonological acquisition. The previous studies have investigated the relationship between theoretical aspects and practical ones; however, there are few studies, which indicated the differentiation between English and learners' mother tongue, focusing on the contrastive analysis. For Japanese learners of English, there are researches, which considered phonetic and phonological similarities and dissimilarities between English and Japanese. There exist some phonetic phenomena which are difficult to acquire even if such English phenomena are similar to Japanese ones, and which are easy to do even if such phenomena are different from Japanese ones. It is significant for these unstable cases to mention second and foreign language acquisition. In addition to the theoretical accounts, it is of importance to consider practical ones based on the pedagogical phonetics as well.

2. Relationship between Second Language Acquisition and Phonetics

There have been investigated second language and foreign language acquisition theories. From viewpoint of learners' mother tongue, language transfer is one of the well-known theories. The transfer theory can be divided into two types: positive and negative one. The former: positive transfer, means that their mother tongue makes good effects for acquisition. On the contrary, the latter: negative transfer, indicates that it makes poor ones. For example, if Japanese learners pronounce "cup" as Japanese sound [a] instead of English sound [ʌ], the Japanese-like pronunciation is comprehensible for native English speakers. This is because English [a] can only exist as the first

element of a diphthong. If the learners speak "thank" to substitute Japanese [e] for English [æ], the sound is not understandable for natives. The former example can be caused by positive transfer while the latter can be done by negative transfer.

When learners have acquired to use the target language instead of their mother tongue, some always utilize generalized acquisition. This is overgeneralization. In this case, such learners can distinguish the target from their language after acquiring target information; however, they tend to make use of acquired target knowledge. If Japanese learners speak acquired English [æ] instead of Japanese [a] at all the phonetic environments, such words are misunderstood by native English speakers. This is mostly because English contains five [a]-like sounds.

According to target languages which are similar or dissimilar to learners' mother tongue, language distance shows language information to what extent the target is similar to their language. This mentions that structural distances between them make some influence on acquisition. For example, if both Japanese and French learners study English which is one of the stress-timed languages, the two learners can not acquire English at the same time. This is partly because Japanese is one of the mora-timed languages and because French is one of the syllable-timed. This leads to one different rhythmic fact that the relations between English and Japanese and between English and French are both similar and dissimilar to each other.

As well as acquisition processes above, according to markedness (Eckman 1977), it is necessary to consider target languages themselves. The [a] sound is articulatorily easy to pronounce for all the learners. On the contrary, the [æ] is difficult to pronounce for them. The former unmarkedness means that language-universal phenomena are easy to acquire. The latter markedness indicates that language-specific phenomena are difficult to.

Focusing on only phonetic aspects, prosodies encourage learners to acquire pronunciation beyond segments (Pennington and Richards 1986). Whether the learners are advanced-level or not, if they use good segments and poor prosodies, their pronunciation is incomprehensive for native English speakers.

On the other hand, if they operate poor segments and good prosodies, such pronunciation is comprehensive for natives. Pedagogically, although it is necessary to acquire the vowels and consonants related to target languages, it is more significant to master the rhythm and intonation even at the beginners' level.

Japanese-like English can be recognized all over the world. Sociophonetically, English as an International Language (EIL) (Smith 1976) is rampant. This means that EIL denied foreign accents and that English was a language spoken by native speakers. Changing with the times, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins 2000) has become conspicuous. This refers to that ELF accepts foreign accents and that English is a language spoken both by natives and by learners. Historically, pronunciation to accept is not accurate but precise for all the people.

3. Phonetic and Phonological Acquisition Theories

Regarding invisible sounds, language distance is a linguistic key to phonetic and phonological acquisition. There are two well-known theories: the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) (Best 1995) and the Speech Learning Model (SLM) (Flege 1995). The former PAM assumes that if learners' mother tongue is close or similar to target languages, it is possible to acquire them.

The latter SLM presumes that if their language is far or different from targets, it is possible to do. For example, if Japanese learners of English have more difficult ways to acquire [r] than [l], this case is caused by PAM. If they have easier ways to acquire [r] than [l], the case is by SLM. This is because phonetically, the Japanese [r]-like sound is farther from [r] than [l].

4. Pedagogical Suggestions

According to pedagogical phonetics (Togo 1999), two aspects are indispensable for Japanese learners to acquire English sounds: phonological aspects and phonetic ones. The former phonological angles mean that it is necessary for the learners to acquire phonetic knowledge. This deductive reasons lead to focusing on each datum based on the rules.

The latter phonetic angles show that it is necessary for the Japanese to get used to practical phonetics at the next stage. This inductive reasons link up with focusing on each rule based on the data.

If Japanese learners can not listen to native speaking, one of the reasons is not to adhere to utterance speed. Articulatorily, to avoid the situation, they should get used to native speed, including rhythm, intonation. Another reason is not to understand some sounds which not are pronounced or which are changed into another. In this case, the learners should acquire phonetic phenomena: liaison, elision, assimilation.

If Japanese learners can not communicate with native speakers, one of the reasons is not to stick to expression adoptable for the situation. Pragmatically, to avert the scene, they should get accustomed to expressing suitable for each locale. Another is to pronounce katakana English or all the words shown by an English dictionary. In this instance, the learners should acquire phonetic phenomena as well.

These pedagogical acquisition processes are not unnecessary for foreigners to study English. Furthermore, it is significant for foreign language teachers to progress methods in teaching English and teacher training (Ohyama 2016).

5. Conclusion

This paper proposed what phonetic difficulties are regarded as by English learners theoretically and practically based on the second language acquisition and pedagogical phonetics. Whether people need EIL or ELF, English is one of the target languages to learn as a second language (ESL) or a foreign one (EFL) all over the world.

As a sound is invisible, Japanese learners should consider phonetic and phonological similarities and dissimilarities between English and Japanese. Based on PAM and SLM, this language distance can solve some phonetic phenomena which are difficult to acquire even if such English phenomena are similar to Japanese ones and some which are easy to do even if such phenomena are different from Japanese ones. It is significant for these unstable cases to mention necessity of second and foreign language

acquisition.

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