Towards setting teaching and learning priorities for acquiring intelligible pronunciation: An expert judgment

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Sound features affecting intelligible pronunciation

- Lexical stress (Field, 2005)
- Sentence stress (Hahn, 2004)
- Speech rate (Munro & Derwing, 2001)
- Phonemic contrasts with high functional load (Munro & Derwing, 2006)

➡ How can we *prioritize* these features for a particular group of L2 learners (e.g., Japanese learners of English) in order to design effective syllabi for teaching intelligible pronunciation in L2 classrooms?

Expert judgment approach

Ellis (2006)

Researchers elicit *experienced teachers' opinions* to identify the relative difficulty, learnability, and teachability of target linguistic features for a particular group of L2 learners (see also Robinson, 1996)

Current Study

RQ1: Which pronunciation features can be relatively crucial for Japanese learners of English to acquire intelligible pronunciation?

RQ2: To what degree do native-speaking (NS) and non-native speaking (NNS) teachers agree and disagree with their priority judgment?

Participants

120 highly-experienced EFL teachers (61 NS and 59 NNS teachers) with homogeneous teaching backgrounds in Japan

- Teach conversational English with a wide range of adult learners
- All of them were not only experienced teachers but also teacher trainers

➡ All of 120 teachers could be *highly qualified* for accurate and intuitive judgment about intelligible pronunciation in L2 communication

Method

17 Segmental Problems

1. / æ / (e.g., man, hat, apple)
2. / ʌ / (e.g., cut, duck)
3. Diphthongs / aʊ, aɪ, oʊ, ɔɪ and eɪ/ (e.g., cow, lie, saw)
4. / w / (e.g., what, when, wood)
5. / r / (e.g., rock, right, read)
6. / l / (e.g., lock, light, lead)
7. / n / (e.g., neat, neck, pattern)
8. / ŋ / (e.g., playing, king, song)
9. / p, t, k / (e.g., pitch, tall, call)
10. / sɪ / (e.g., sip, sit, sick)
11. / ʃɪ / (e.g., sheep, sheet, ship)
12. / tɪ / (e.g., ticket, team, tip)
13. / θ / (e.g., think, thing, thick)
14. / ð / (e.g., this, that, although)
15. / f / (e.g., feet, fall, fill)
16. / v / (e.g., very, vase, voice)
17. / h / (e.g., hear, hall, hill)

(Lambacher, 1999; Riney & Anderson-Hsieh, 1993)

8 Suprasegmental Problems

1. Word Stress
(e.g., ADvise vs. adVICE; deSSERT vs. DEsert)
2. Sentence Stress
(e.g., HE studied yesterday vs. he STUDIED yesterday)
3. Intonation
(e.g., Does he want to eat it? What do you think?)
4. Speech Rate
(e.g., if Japanese learners speak faster, could their speech be more intelli
5. Fluency
(e.g., speak with few or too many pauses, false starts, repetitions and hes
6. Syllabification: Japanese learners frequently put vowels after consonan
(e.g., I want[O] s[U]peak[U] Eng[U]lish[U])
7. Cognates: Japanese learners continue to use KATAKANA
(e.g., アップルfor "apple", レストラン for "restaurant", テーブルfor "table"
8. Contraction
(e.g., won't, can't, could've, might've)

(Lambacher, 1999; Riney & Anderson-Hsieh, 1993)

1. / æ / (e.g., man, hat, apple)
(1. 2. 3. 4. 5.)
Very important Neutral Not very important

2. / ʌ / (e.g., cut, duck)
(1. 2. 3. 4. 5.)
Very important Neutral Not very important

3. Diphthongs / aʊ, aɪ, oʊ, ɔɪ and eɪ/ (e.g., cow, lie, saw, boy, cake)
(1. 2. 3. 4. 5.)
Very important Neutral Not very important

4. / w / (e.g., what, when, wood)
(1. 2. 3. 4. 5.)
Very important Neutral Not very important

5. / r / (e.g., rock, right, read)
(1. 2. 3. 4. 5.)
Very important Neutral Not very important

Results (Principle Component Analysis)

- Eight problematic pronunciation areas were identified and prioritized:

1. Major segmentals /l, ɹ, ð, θ, v/
2. Syllable-related problems [Cognates, Syllabification]
3. Assimilation /si, ʃi, ti/
4. Stress/Intonation [sentence/lexical stress, intonation]
5. Secondary segmentals /æ, ʌ, f/
6. Diphthongs problems /aʊ, aɪ, oʊ, ɔɪ, eɪ/
7. Minor segmentals /p, t, k, w, n, ŋ, h/ + contractions
8. Rhythm problems [fluency, speech rate]

Results (Analysis of Variance)

- NS and NNS teachers agreed:

1. Major segmentals /l, ɹ, ð, θ, v/
2. Syllable-related problems [Cognates, Syllabification]
3. Assimilation /si, ʃi, ti/

- NS and NNS teachers disagreed:

4. Stress/Intonation [sentence/lexical stress, intonation]
5. Secondary segmentals /æ, ʌ, f/
6. Diphthongs problems /aʊ, aɪ, oʊ, ɔɪ, eɪ/
7. Minor segmentals /p, t, k, w, n, ŋ, h/ + contractions
8. Rhythm problems [fluency, speech rate]

Discussion

RQ1: How to identify and prioritize pronunciation features for Japanese learners of English?

- Expert judgment ranked eight problematic pronunciation areas
- Teachers and students should equally focus on (a) segmentals and suprasegmentals; and (b) universal pronunciation problems (e.g., the most important segmentals and syllable-level suprasegmental rules) and L1 related pronunciation problems (e.g., cognates and assimilation problems)

RQ2: Do NS and NNS teachers make similar priority judgment?

- NS and NNS teachers agreed upon the most important segmental and suprasegmental rules.
- NS and NNS teachers shared a similar consensus of what affects intelligible pronunciation in a broad sense (especially crucial sound features)
- Concur with other researchers who claim that general reactions towards accented speech might not differ between NSs and NNSs (Field, 2005; Munro et al., 2006)

Conclusion

- Expert judgments enable us to rank important pronunciation features for acquiring intelligible pronunciation at a practical level (i.e., creating phonological syllabus).
- The methodology could be highly replicable not only in a similar Asian EFL contexts (e.g., Korea, China) but also generally in ESL classrooms around the world.

Thank you!!