

国际英语口语可理解性 研究与语音教学

Research and Pedagogy in English
Pronunciation, Accentedness,
Intelligibility and Comprehensibility

邓军 著



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前言

Preface

在全球化的 21 世纪, 英语已经成为国际交流的主要工作语言。语音是语言重要的一部分, 语音的正确与否直接影响语言意义的表达。语音习得是掌握一门语言的基础。对于英语非母语者而言, 语音教学是培养他们语音素质的主要途径之一。英语作为第二语言或外语者, 他们的英语语音因受母语的影响, 往往带有地方口音, 在英语交际场合中, 会给交际双方带来理解困难与交际障碍, 这也意味着交际者需要具备听懂标准英语与非标准英语的能力, 准确明白说话者的意图。许多国际知名教授与学者来自英语非母语的 国家, 他们的英语表达带有地方口音, 给来自其他语言背景的专家、学者、留学生等带来听力理解障碍。所以, 如何提高学生自身的发音标准、提高他们对不同英语口音的辨识与理解能力, 对培养国际化人才, 促进国际英语交流, 具有非常重要的意义。

本书内容分为六章: 第一章讨论影响英语语音习得的多种因素(如年龄、母语干扰、学习者个性差异等); 第二章重点探究英

语口音程度 (accentedness)、清晰度 (intelligibility)、理解难度 (comprehensibility) 等问题;第三章论述英语语音教学策略;第四章以实例展示如何通过个性化辅导减弱口音程度 (accent reduction);第五章推出英语口语辨析与理解能力培训的课程教学设计;第六章则以实例说明如何撰写相关研究计划。附录提供更多相关资料,为英语语音教学与研究提供参考。

本书系中南大学教育教学改革研究项目(2017jy66)及湖南省普通高校教学改革研究项目(湘教通[2017]452号)的研究成果。

在此衷心感谢中南大学出版社与本科生院的资助,感谢学生李凯琳对参考书目的整理。书中若有错漏之处,请读者批评指正。

邓军

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Chapter One

Pronunciation Acquisition

Pronunciation refers to the way how a word is said and how a language is spoken. It, like listening and speaking, is a central component of oral communication among people whose English is a second language (Murphy, 1991). English pronunciation includes vowels, consonants, weak forms, linking, word stress, prominence, and intonations (see Appendix 1 – Appendix 6). Many researchers have called for increased attention to this aspect of second language speech, because of its importance not only to intelligibility, but to social integration. There are a variety of factors influencing pronunciation acquisition, including the age of onset, use of the first language (L1) and the second language (L2), L1 transfer, and cognitive variables (such as short-memory, listening ability).

There are conflicting opinions on the relationship between *age* and pronunciation acquisition. Edwards and Zampini (2008) suggested that age plays a crucial role in L2 acquisition. Most L2 late learners fail to acquire native-like language. They noticed that there is

a critical period for language learning (Lenneberg, 1967) to explain first language acquisition, which claims that neurocognitive mechanisms of language acquisition become defective by the close of the critical period so that native-like attainment in both L1 and L2 is impossible. However, it does not follow that such a theory can also apply to L2 acquisition. Flege (1995) found that, though older learners' perception ability is weaker than that of younger learners, the mechanisms for sound production remain intact when age increases, and sound perception can change with L2 experience, which implies that even late learners can achieve native-like pronunciation.

Bongaerts (1997) conducted a study to explore the reasons why some late L2 learners have acquired native-like pronunciation in L2. The study involved 10 highly successful Dutch English late learner participants who were exposed to a large amount authentic English input consistently for 18 years, whose utterances were judged as native-like and undistinguishable from that of the native speakers. Those late learners' ultimate attainment in L2 pronunciation was an exceptional case. He explained that, due to the loss of the original perceptual and motoric abilities for L1 sound system acquisition, late learners' L1 phonetic categories hinders the establishment of a new one for L2 sounds. Therefore, late L2 learners must develop another mode of perception for pronunciation acquisitions in L2. The success of a few late learners' acquisitions of native-like pronunciation, attributes to the interplay of certain learner characteristics (e. g., high motivation) and learning contexts (i. e., continuous access to target

language input and intensive training in both perception and production in L2).

In order to explore the interplay of the age of exposure, motivation and instructional variables on ultimate attainment in L2 phonology, Moyer (1999) recruited 24 graduate students in German in a reading-aloud task, a spontaneous speech tasks, and a self-report task. The findings revealed that it is possible for later learners to acquire native-like phonology in L2 under optimal circumstances, and have precise accuracy, pragmatic and cultural fluency to overcome potential maturational constraints. Age is confounded with numerous factors that account for the learning outcome, which include motivation, cultural empathy, and desire to sound like a native speaker, and type and amount of instruction/input. Overt phonological instruction, authentic input and feedback at sentence and discourse level are also essential for native-level phonological development and production. Birdsong (2007) investigated the late Anglophone learners' native-like and nonnative-like pronunciation in French at both segmental and sentence levels, and explored whether performance at one level of analysis could be predictive of performance of another level. 22 Anglophone late learners who started learning French after puberty were randomly selected. 17 native speakers of French made up the control group. At the segmental level, /i/, /e/, /o/, and /u/ were each exemplified in three different words (a total of 12 words) for measures of vowel duration; /p/, /k/, and /t/ were each represented in three different nouns for the analysis of voice onset

time. At sentence level, participants read aloud three paragraphs, which contain a variety of lexical items and nearly all the phonetic inventory of French. Three native speakers of French, who had French teaching experience, were asked to judge the global accent of the participants on a 5-point scale (“5” means “no foreign accent” and “1” means “strong foreign accent”). Their ratings of all participants whose global pronunciation was near-native reached a strong agreement, but the ratings were diverse for those whose global pronunciation was less native like. The results show that 9% of the 22 participants were capable of producing vowels with native like durational values and consonant with native like values. Birdsong generalized the findings to the population the sample represent and claimed that about 10 percent of long-resident, educated Anglophone late learners of French would be able to sound like natives. The study also indicates that, though at the segmental level, L2 learners are able to sound like a native speaker when using segments that are dissimilar from those in the L1, they have difficulty with those in the L2 that are acoustically similar in their L1.

In sum, on the one hand, under certain conditions, some adults can acquire the local accent, if they are highly motivated and have phonetic training (Birdsong, 2007). On the other hand, young bilingual learners might be non-native-like in L2 phonetic production, particularly those who use their L1 more than L2 (Flege et al., 2006). It can be concluded that a critical period may not exist for L2 learners.

Nearly five decades ago, Oller and Ziahosseiny (1970) proposed that similarity plays a crucial role in phonology acquisition. Similar phenomena are more difficult to learn than dissimilar phenomena. The reason is that different features are more likely to be noticed and learning is more likely to take place, while minimal differences often go unnoticed and thus are less likely to be learnt. Moreover, unsimilar phenomena are acquired at faster rates than similar phenomena (Major & Kim, 1996). Major (1986) reported that the numerous errors (e. g., /r/ and /l/) occur at the initial stage due to *L1 transfer*, then the number become smaller over time. Vogel (1991) proposed that prosodic features are more likely to transfer from L1 to L2 because of their abstract nature. For example, Archibald (1997) found that Chinese (a tone language) speakers do not treat L2 stress as a lexical phenomenon and seldom assign L2 stress by using the application of metrical parameters.

Elliot's study (1997) provided empirical evidence that more *L1 transfer* errors emerge in a casual speech than in a formal one, when learners focus more on meaning communication than on pronunciation. Learners' improvement on individual consonants and vowels varies from sounds to sounds. Some seem to be easier to acquire because of a positive transfer, and others could be difficult to improve partly due to markedness. In addition to L1 interference, affective factor and interaction with native English speakers are also found vital in pronunciation acquisition. Flege and his colleagues (1997) found that both the experienced and the inexperienced German participants were

able to distinguish between /i/ and /I/, because in German there is a phonemic distinction between the two sounds, while L1 speakers of Korean, Mandarin, and Spanish, experienced or inexperienced, have difficulty telling their differences. They might perceive the two sounds as the same /i/ sound, since the sound /I/ does not exist in the L1. They concluded that the nature of L1 vowel inventory, such as vowel duration, also plays a role in L2 production.

Major (2001) postulated that for marked phenomena, L2 acquisition proceeds slowly, transfer decreases and then decreases more slowly, universals increase and then decrease slowly; mother tongue transfer is more crucial for similar phenomena, while universals play a more important role for marked phenomena. The conditions for *L1 transfer* to occur could be rather complicated. For one thing, it is hard to provide a clear-cut definition of similarity; for another, it is difficult to tell whether a L2 variant is a result of L1 transfer, or universals, or both, in some cases.

Researchers have examined a range of empirical studies that focus on L1 transfer of segmentals and suprasegmentals. For example, Flege (1987) found that inexperienced L2 learners do not distinguish stop L1 /t/ from L2 /t/, because the similarity of the two sounds inhibits the establishment of a separate category of the L2 sound. Only the most experienced L2 speakers have the capability of producing a stop that is like that of monolingual L1 speakers. Interestingly, because of the cross-linguistic variation, many authors have used L2

stop consonants to determine the degree of accent in L2 speech. Lombardi (2003) indicated that L2 speakers of certain L1 consistently substitute /t/ for the target sound /θ/ in English, while those of other L1 languages substitute a different sound /s/ for it because of the ranking of the fricative phonetic variant in their L1. Zampini (2008) found that the stop sounds, such as voiced /p/, /t/, /k/ and voiced /b/, /d/, /g/, may have different voice onset time in French and English.

The interactions of short-term and long-term *phonological memory* play an essential role in the process of pronunciation acquisition, and one's ability to learn phonological sequences is the core of vocabulary learning, idiom learning and the acquisition of grammar (Ellis, 1996). Phonological short-term memory involves temporary encoding storage of new words, particularly that of productive vocabulary. Phonological representation and rehearsal of a new language lead to grammatical fluency and accuracy as well as pronunciation accuracy. Therefore, learners' phonological ability can serve as a good predictor of their ability to acquire both L1 and L2 skills.

Listening ability, particularly aural discrimination of sound patterns, according to Choi (1988) and Murphy (1991), also plays a critical role in comprehension and accurate pronunciation. *Gender* is found not a strong predictor of pronunciation accuracy but appears to influence the access to L2 use opportunities and thus affect L2 development (Piske et al., 2001). *Length of residence* is not a very

useful factor, either. Piske (2007) argued that living in a L2 context for a long time does not mean additional language experience. What counts is the quality and quantity of L2 input a learner receives.



Questions for Discussion

1. *Reflecting on your personal English learning experience, do you think you have any segmental and suprasegmental errors resulted from L1 transfer?*
2. *What factors do you think are most important in your acquisition of English pronunciation?*



Chapter Two

Accentedness, Intelligibility and Comprehensibility

English is the language of the world (Crystal, 2003). In 2008 alone, it was used by an estimated two billion of people as a first language or second language for a wide range of functions, including international safety, travel, advertising, education, etc. (Crystal, 2008). That is to say, at least one-third of the world's population is English speakers and the number is growing. Kachru (1985) proposed three concentric circles of English based on the historical context status and functions in different regions: The Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. *The Inner Circle* consists of the native English speaking countries, such as the U.K., the U.S.A., Canada and Australia; *the Outer Circle* includes the countries where English has the status of official or second language such as India and Singapore; whereas *the Expanding Circle* comprises countries where English is learned as a foreign language as in China. People from different nations speak English with a local accent, such as British accent, Singaporean accent, etc. There are some variations

across accents (see Appendix 7).

Accentedness, *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* are the three major dimensions of L2 speech. According to Derwing and Munro (1997), *accentedness* refers to the extent to which a listener judges L2 speech that differ from native speaker norms; *Comprehensibility* is a subjective assessment of ease or difficulty of comprehension, while *intelligibility* can be defined as how much a listener actually understands.

Social identity can be expressed in one's accent (Zuengler, 1988). Gathbonton (1975) and Thompson (1991) advocated that L2 learners are aware that accent signals ethnic identity. To illustrate how, a L2 speaker uses L2 to construct social identity in L2 community. Marx (2002) told a story of a Canadian English speaker who tried to reject the first culture of German by avoiding members of the L1 culture and attempting to have native-like L2 accent in order to be accepted as a competent member of the second culture. To achieve the level of nativeness, she even adopted the clothing and manners of the local community.

Gathbonton, Trofimovich and Magid's (2005) study revealed a relationship between learners' L2 accent and perceived affiliation to their home ethnic group, suggesting that learners treat their peers' L2 accent as an indicator of their degree of ethnic affiliation. The findings of this study suggest that teachers should create an atmosphere where ethnic group affiliation is positively acknowledged.

In a study concerning how people with foreign accents were treated in their community, Munro (2003) identified two factors that account for adult ESL speakers' foreign accent: a) speakers' L1 sound system that interferes with their perception and production of that of L2; and b) native speakers' high sensitivity to foreign accent. It has been reported that many people hold discriminatory attitudes toward accented speakers and regard them as less interesting, convincing, physically attractive and of lower social status, etc. The researcher categorized three kinds of accent discrimination: a) discrimination in employment due to inappropriate concern with accent; b) discrimination due to accent stereotyping (i.e., people hold prejudice against a particular group of people) in employment and tenancy; and c) harassment (vicious teasing) of ESL users based on accent (i.e., the belief that people speak English with accent are unintelligible, though studies have shown that heavily accented speech can be perfectly intelligible). Those ESL speakers' language skills were ridiculed or criticized based on their ethnicity and origin. The researcher called on ESL teachers to stop accent discrimination in classroom and in the community. In the teaching of phonetics, teachers need to distinguish and focus on the accented speech patterns that hinder communication from those who do not. Teachers also need to convey positive attitudes toward accent and make students aware that it is normal for adult learners and inform them about their human rights and the action they may take if they encounter accent discrimination. In the community, teachers need to speak against the negative attitudes towards language and accent and oppose efforts that harm L2 users.