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Second Foreign Language Education in Japan - Focus on Pronunciation

The two papers discuss problems of pronunciation for Japanese students studying a second foreign language. Studying a foreign language means that students' perception is influenced by their first language (Japanese) and by their first foreign language (L2) English. How this is effecting their pronunciation and listening in the second foreign language? The approach includes Chinese and German, two totally different languages. One paper will focus on specific problems for Chinese, the other paper on German. By discussing the topic pronunciation and listening from two different angles, we try a new comparative approach and would like to discuss it.

「日本人学生に中国語発音習得の難関」(Teaching Chinese as a Second Foreign Language in Japan with a focus on Pronunciation)

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この研究は日本人学生に中国語発音習得の難関をいかに乗り越えられることについて検討した。中国語の発音は、子音+母音+声調で構成され、ピンインと言います。子音は21個で、母音は36個である。一つ一つを教え、多数の時間がかかります。実際中国語のテキストにあるピンイン教育の部分が多いほど、学生にとっては、逆に中国語発音習得の難しさが増え、その中国語発音習得に対して、心理的にやる気をなくさせ、中国語発音の完全把握に支障をもたらしてしまうことになる。原因を追及すると、以下のようなことが分かる。他外国語の場合、発音記号と文字表記とは一緒になっており、発音を勉強すると同時に、単語(言葉)を身につけることになる。それと比べて、中国語は、発音記号と文字表記とは全く別なものであるため、今までのテキストにある内容の配分だと、発音の部分が終わってから単語(言葉)の勉強に入るようなことにより、発音と単語との習得を分けてしまい、発音の段階だけでは発音を完全にマスターすることが出来ず、発音再教育をしなければならないことになる。余計に中国語の発音が難しいと感じさせられてしまうのである。そのために、テキストから中国語発音教育の内容を簡素化して、他の外国語教育の経験をかがみにし、出来るだけ発音と同時に言葉の勉強をさせるようにと提案し、論を結びました。

German as a Foreign Language in Japan: Focus on Pronunciation and Listening
(Deutsch als Fremdsprache - Aussprache- und Hörprobleme von japanischen Studierenden)

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1) Introduction

This paper gives a short discussion of some topics concerning pronunciation in the classroom. The teachers' and the experts' perception are not the same. On the other hand the languages studied have to lined up to, in order to support the students efforts.

2) The view of teachers for German in Japan

For German as a Foreign Language Japanese German teachers consider the following sounds as difficult for pronunciation:

Vowels:

<ä> as in „sägen(to saw)“ /zæ:gən/,

<ö> as in „schön(beautiful)“ /ʃø:n/,

<ü> as in „üben(exercise)“ /y:bən/.

These are the so-called „umlaut-vowels“, being pronounced with rounded lips, for Japanese especially the <ö> and <ü> are difficult. The visual impression from the spelling will suggest something like a <o> or a <u>, but this is misleading. The <ö> is close to the <e> and the <ü> is close to the <i>, for both the difference are rounded and unrounded lips:

	front vowel with tense and unrounded lips	front (mid) vowel with forward rounded lips
close (long), close(-mid) (short)	<i>: /i:/ long, /ɪ/ short	<ü>: /y:/ long, /ʏ/ short
close-mid (long), open-mid (short)	<e>: /e:/ long, /ɛ/ short	<ö>: /ø:/ long, /œ/ short

Consonants:

<r> {uvular fricative} as in „Regen (rain)“ /'rɛ:gən/, „Ware (goods)“ /'va:rə/, „Mozart“ /'mo:zært/, „Jahr (year)“ /ja:r/, „Frage (question)“ /'fʁa:gə/

<l> {alveolar lateral approximant} as in „Leben(life)“ /le:bən/,

 {bilabial plosive voiced} as in „Buch(book)“ /bu:ç/,

<v> [f] or [v] as realized in „Vater(father)“ /'fa:tə/ and „Vase“ /'va:zə/,

<w> {labiodental fricative voiced} as in “wo(where)” /vo:/,
 <s> {alveolar fricative voiced/voiceless} as in „Sonne(sun)” /'zɔnə/, „Rose(rose)” /'ʁo:zə/, „Gras(Gras)” /gʁa:s/, and {postalveolar fricative voiceless} in combinations as „Sport” /ʃpɔʁt/, „Stadt(city)” /ʃtat/
 <n> {alveolar nasal} as in „nennen(to tell)” /'nɛnən/,
 <h> {glottal fricative} as in „Hase(rabbit)” /'ha:zə/,
 <f> {labiodental fricative voiceless} as in „Fisch“ /fiʃ/,
 <ch> {palatal fricative} as in „nicht(not)” /niçt/ and {velar fricative} „Nacht(night)” /naxt/.

The <b - w - m> and the <f - h> are very sensible. As the <f> is a sound used in English as in German, many students are not aware of the sound being a {labiodental fricative}. They substitute a Japanese [hu], which is more or less [bilabial] bringing it close to the <w>, pronounced in English as {bilabial fricative voiced} /β/.

Besides these vowels and consonants, the teachers for German in Japan mentioned the influence of English, the supra segmental patterns of the sentence (intonation, melody of the sentence) and the influence of the structure of the Japanese Language often mentioned in the terms of “katakana-German” or “katakana-English”.

3) The view of experts for German

The German scholar for Phonetics of German, Ursula Hirschfeld from Halle University, stressed three key topics for pronunciation in German, because they are crucial for distinguishing meaning and support intelligibility: 1) the long and short vowels, 2) the word stress and 3) the prosodic patterns of the sentence.

The last one was included in the teachers list above, but the length of the vowels was not mentioned. The length of the vowels change in German very much, depending if they are long or short and if they are stressed or in a non-stressed syllable. So there is a rhythm in words, vertical with the length of the vowels and vertical with the word stress. As Japanese syllables have all the same length and only a little change in word stress, this is a real challenge to distinguish three levels of vowel length and including the word stress:

	long stressed and short not stressed	short stressed	short not stressed
<e>	Seele(soul) /'ze:lə/	Bett(bed) /'bɛt/	Gefahr(danger) /gə'fa:v/
Japanese	/zɛ lɛ/, /zɛ: lɛ/, /zɛ lɛ:/	/bɛ to/	/gɛ fa ru/, /gɛ: fa ru/

students			
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The perception of English as well does influence the pronunciation of German considering the length of the vowels:

	English short	German long	Japanese students
the colour red	<red> /rɜd/	rot /ro:t/	/rɔt/

4) Outlook

The perception of the teachers teaching German in Japan and of the experts of phonetics for German as a Foreign Language is to some extent different. The teachers focus very much on some sounds. The experts focus more on supra segmental features.

It is about time to bring this both approaches together in order to get results in the classroom. Pronunciation is very much underestimated and very important. It is crucial for a successful speaker of a foreign language. Another important factor concerns the foreign languages taught. They line up to each other and they can have beneficial impacts, supporting each other in synergetic approach.

There is more detailed study required focusing on the outcome of the pedagogy in the classroom.

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