

Designing English pronunciation materials: Based on affective activities for English learners in a Japanese university

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**Designing English pronunciation materials:
Based on affective activities for English learners in a Japanese university**

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Abstract

This paper presents one instructional method for introducing English pronunciation to false beginners in Japanese universities. The focus for material development was placed on the learners' affective phase. The designed materials were implemented in a non-English major Japanese university English classroom as warm-up activities. Both post-instruction feedback from the participants and observation of students' involvement during the instruction showed that the presented instruction designed with affective material led to undivided engagement of the learners' oral production.

Introduction

There are a number of Japanese university students who have seriously studied English under Japanese English education. By daily encountering those learners in English classrooms, the following thought naturally occurred: If students who acquired English grammar and vocabulary could make sentences orally, they would feel much more confident in their English learning. The resulting confidence combined with their oral communication ability would broaden their future opportunities in more active communication with others.

In launching this research, the base idea was retrieved from the publicized paper entitled *Instructors' Strategy and Reflection for Designing English Lessons: Focusing on the Developing Presentation Skills* by Chujo 2005 reported in Japanese. In the present research, classroom English pronunciation instruction was designed for the purpose of gearing down the anxiety and hesitation that Japanese learners of English have in oral communication. The materials were arranged in the order of requiring less psychological pressuring activities to higher ones. In addition, it was expected that this instruction would help make students more aware of the importance and power of good oral communication ability.

Through the observations of Japanese learners' attitudes toward and motivation for English learning in English classrooms, it was revealed that the behavior of instructors in addressing the learners can play a crucial role in oral communication

instruction. It is namely the learners' psychological care in the classrooms. Good psychological care holds the key for the success of classroom-based oral production because the learners' insecurities and fears can keep them from even attempting oral production. Therefore, the first priority in developing materials was set to create a comfortable and secure classroom environment. To emphasize this point further, the lesson was designed with fun and comprehensible materials.

In the following, first, the characteristics and issues of English education in Japan are surveyed. Second, positive affective-based pronunciation instruction for English learners in the Japanese university is presented. The designed materials were implemented in a non-English major English classroom as warm-up activities. Finally, the effect of the presented materials is discussed.

Overview of English educational issues in Japan today

There are two major viewpoints within the current dominant English instruction which is based on the Communicative Approach from 1980s to present. The first is that communication is the primary purpose of language. The second is that pronunciation instruction is crucial. Japanese instruction of English pronunciation, however, does not follow this trend. Until recently English has been taught as a foreign language beginning in junior high school anywhere from the age of 12 to 15. Prior to students' entrance into a university, their previous six years of English education are focused on mastering grammar and vocabulary because gaining a high score on the test which focuses on these abilities is the crucial goal. In this respect, acquiring conversational competence is not a primary goal. The above situation has brought about the consequence that English is being taught and learned as academic knowledge, not for the purpose of communication. Therefore, actual communication practice, especially spoken phrases in the classroom, is scarce.

Among the above characteristics and issues of English education in Japan, the amount of English phonetic education has been disregarded and is in need of major improvements. Ohtaka (1996) states that while the need for English phonetic training is widely recognized it is not actually practiced in the classrooms for the following four reasons: 1) Grammar translation instruction is emphasized for entrance examinations; 2) Actual opportunities of speaking outside of the classroom are not increasing; 3) Japanese English educators have low confidence in their own English pronunciation; and 4) English instructional theory is underdeveloped.

Furthermore, a phonetics class is not required for English teachers to obtain a teaching qualification. The teachers are not confident that they can provide a good

speaking model and are not sure how to instruct English phonetics. The students who do not have the opportunity to learn the English phonetic system become teachers of English for the next generation. This creates a vicious cycle that perpetuates the absence of pronunciation practice in English classrooms in Japan.

Modern approaches to pronunciation teaching and their methodologies

According to Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (1996), English phonetic theoretical approaches have changed many times throughout the history of English education. The Reform Movement practices from the 1890s and the Audiolingual/Oral Approach from 1940s to 1950s are considered as the methods in the forefront of instruction while the Direct Method and naturalistic methods from the late 1800s to the early 1900s are considered to be the methods in the back wings of instruction. They further explain the two modern approaches of teaching pronunciation: the Intuitive-imitative approach and the Analytic-linguistic approach. The Intuitive-imitative approach had been used prior to the late nineteenth century and was the only approach at the time. It relies on the learners' ability to listen to and imitate the target language sounds. It does not present explicit information on English phonetics. The Analytic-linguistic approach utilizes information and tools such as a phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, charts of the vocal apparatus, contrastive information, etc. It explicitly directs the learners to focus attention on the sounds and rhythms of the target language. This approach does not replace the Intuitive-imitative approach, but complements it.

Moreover, Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) suggest the following methodology of teaching English pronunciation: listening and imitation, phonetic training, minimal pair drills, contextualized minimal pairs, visual aids, tongue twisters, developmental approximation drills, practice of vowel shifts and stress shifts related by affixation, reading aloud/recitation, and recordings of learners' production. Many other methodologies have been utilized in English classrooms. However, in Japan, systematic phonetic instructional theories are still immature.

Important basis factor for successful pronunciation training in Japanese classrooms

In starting phonetic instruction in Japanese English classrooms, high psychobiological care is one of the primary requirements. Krashen (1981, 1982) and Krashen & Terrell (1983) in their Affective Filter Hypothesis, which is one of the five hypotheses of The Monitor Hypotheses dealing with how affective factors relate to second language acquisition, state that the affective filter controls how much input the student comes into

contact with and how much input is converted into intake. The higher the affective filters are, the less input the learners' take in. Thus the learner's motivation, self-confidence and anxiety affect the filter.

The following five typical Japanese English learners' attitudes toward English learning are especially applicable when instructors request individual oral production and when instruction is held in English for non-English majors: 1) low motivation for learning English; 2) high anxiety and low confidence; 3) loss of interest; 4) lack of courage for oral production in the classroom; and 5) embarrassment. These attitudes necessitate prioritizing psychobiological care. Creating a relaxed and comfortable environment is essential for the learners to practice oral communication. Not taking good care in this area at the very beginning of instruction could lead to struggling the entire semester to just get an audible voice from the students in the classroom. Therefore, creating a comfortable atmosphere and supporting it with teaching materials that naturally allow oral production is a crucial step.

Positively Affective-Based English Phonetic Instruction

Positively Affective-Based English Phonetic Instruction for Japanese Learners of English is the title given by the author to instruction that takes into full consideration the learners' affective domain. The instruction is developed with fun materials to naturally induce oral engagement in the classroom. Only a very limited number of necessary phonetic segments were selected for Japanese learners of English using an easily comprehensible presentation of phonetic points. Through the lesson the learners come to know what points to pay attention to for intelligible communication.

The purposes of utilizing presenting approach are to retain students' interest by avoiding tedious practice, to naturally increase the amount of actual practice in class, to raise awareness of English pronunciation, and to present the phonetic target materials through a simple and easy-to-understand method. To realize these purposes, several affective multiple teaching methods and materials have been combined and incorporated in the lessons.

Basic principles for designing the Positively Affective-Based English Phonetic Instruction for Japanese Learners of English

In designing the lessons, the following three points became the core principles:

At first, all the presented materials were introduced through sounds with listening dictation practice. This process allows the students to get a concrete image of the sounds and get comfortable with the sounds they will practice later on. They need

time and exposure to comfortably produce sounds.

Second, instruction was held first implicitly then explicitly. Because they are adult learners, explicit instruction is beneficial for mastering the target materials and applying the phonetic rules. However, the balance is important. The amount of actual practice needed to master the target material becomes the focus, not simply obtaining the knowledge.

Third, practice began from suprasegmentals rather than segmentals: Giving priority to the suprasegmental aspects of English not only improves learners' comprehensibility but is also less frustrating for students because greater change can be effected in the short time. Encouraging them to make oral engagements is the priority.

Implementation of the instruction

Target students for this instruction were sophomores in a Japanese university majoring in Engineering and were predominately male. Their L1 was Japanese and their English level in terms of vocabulary and grammar was intermediate. The instruction was held for ten weeks as warm up activities for 15-20 minutes in the beginning of every class. A combination of several methods and materials was used. Both explicit and implicit instruction approaches were utilized.

Material design and selection criteria

The instruction for above mentioned group of students has five steps under the Positively Affective-Based English Phonetic Instruction. To ease the learners' affective burden toward oral production in the classroom, the materials were designed with the order from requiring low to high physiological engagement. For example, a comparison between the first steps in practicing tongue twisters requires less demanding work psychologically than singing or conducting a presentation in front of classmates. The presented step by step introduction allows the students to ease into the transition from one activity to another gradually. In addition, the targeted phonetic features were explicitly selected for the Japanese learners of English.

Step 1: Tongue Twisters (visualized presentation to get the rhythm)

Step 2: Consonants (Explanation & hand gestures)

Step 3: Chants (Listening dictation activities, created by the author and *Jazz Chants* from Graham (1978))

Step 4: Nursery Rhymes (Utilizing kinetic approach, hand play with three levels)

Step 5: Presentation (Presenting with memorization)

(A sample of the actual material is provided in the appendix.)

The above materials were selected for the following three reasons: 1) Mastering the presented material sounds difficult when the students first hear the demonstration; 2) even though the sounds initially give the impression of never being able to be mastered, the material needs to be approachable in short practice and appropriate for their level; and 3) the content of the material includes certain rhythms. Students can easily notice their achievement. For example, if they cannot do the chant with the right rhythm or if stops, it becomes obvious by their own evaluation, they need more practice. The feeling of wishing to complete the material naturally increases the amount of practice. The materials should be ones which give students an accomplished feeling after their oral practice. If they are able to speak with a consistent rhythm without falling behind or stopping, they feel a sense of achievement and an increase in confidence, which motivates them to keep practicing in the next step.

Students' comments

Here are some of the students' comments after engaging in the presented instruction. The comments were collected in written Japanese. Most of the comments were received in multiples. There were no negative comments found.

- This was a new/interesting /exciting/unexpected way of learning pronunciation.
- I felt as if I was into the practice.
- I never thought tongue twisters could be pronunciation practice.
- Chanting continued even after class.
- The classroom became one.
- Singing with hand play was difficult but fun.
- I was surprised when I was cooking and chanting unconsciously at home.
- I want to practice more in this way.
- I feel like my pronunciation is becoming better.

Conclusions and pedagogical implications for Japanese English university learners

Based on the instructor's observation and the comments from the students, it is clear that the designed and selected materials motivated the target students. This was especially found to be true for the fifth step of the presentation. It was very obvious that learners planned and practiced a number of times with cooperation from their pairs.

Their attitude toward the activities was reflected in the quality and loudness of the voices and their attitude reflected their confidence and positive engagement toward the activity. The important psychological care was working well and attention was drawn toward English oral production with these methodologies and materials.

This affective-based instruction was implemented as warm-up activities, therefore phonetic evaluation was not held. In spite of the obvious enjoyment of the students, mastering the target pronunciation material and applying it naturally seems an arduous process for Japanese fossilized pronunciation in English. Patience is crucial for both instructors and learners. Further extensive systematic material design is required. In order to achieve the goal, repeated extensive reminders and actual practice are required until automatization of the targeted pronunciation is achieved. Using the basic methodologies and materials presented herein, extending this warm up into the semester instruction is the next goal.

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Appendix

Examples of Materials Used for the English Pronunciation Practice

♣1 早口言葉 (Tongue Twisters) ♣

□英語の早口言葉(tongue twisters)に挑戦してみましよう。“tongue”は「舌」、
“twist”は「ねじる、巻きつける」という意味です。それぞれの早口言葉には、皆
さんにマスターしてもらいたい発音ポイントがあります。その部分に注意しな
がら最初はゆっくりと練習しましよう。少し慣れてきたらそれぞれ5回ずつ挑
戦してみます。最終的に正確な発音でどのくらい早く間違えずに言うことがで
きるでしょうか？

She sells seashells down by the seashore.

♣ 2 L の発音 (Pronunciation of L) ♣

□Lの発音を練習してみましよう。

1. 1の早口言葉からLの音を探し、黒で下線を引いてください。

Find the L sound in the previous tongue twister and underline it in black.

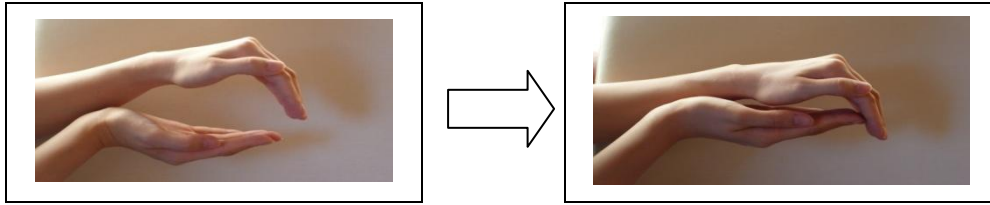
2. この音を正確に発音するためのポイントです。注意しながら練習してみま
よう。

Here are the points for pronunciation of the sound 「L」 .

1. 舌尖を裏の歯と歯茎の間につける。Put only the tip of the tongue against the
upper gum ridge.

(この音には息が舌の両サイドから流れる特徴があります。ですから、両サイ
ドは少し開けておきます。)

2. 舌をつけたままで息を舌の両サイドから出します。Push the airstream out from
the both sides



< Tongue position with hand movement >

Hands represent upper jaw and tongue. The upper hand's nails represent teeth and the first joint line of each finger represents the border between the teeth and gum.

手を上顎と舌と考えてみてください。

上顎を表している手の爪は歯、指の第一関節のラインが歯茎を表します。

♣ 3 チャンツ (Chants) ♣

□チャンツ(chants)とは曲の無い詞だけの歌です。英語のネイティブスピーカーが“chants”という語を聞くと、「お経」を思い浮かべる人が多いようです。

1. She Sells Seashells Down by the Seashore

She sells seashells down by the seashore
 She sells seashells down by the seashore.
 Are these real shells? Yes they are.
 Isn't that beautiful? Isn't that beautiful?

She sells seashells down by the seashore.
 She sells seashells down by the seashore.

Pie shell, egg shell, nut shell, turtle shell,

X X X X

Rachel sells seashells down by the seashore.

♣ 4 ナーサリーライム (Nursery Rhymes) ♣

□この曲のメロディーは皆さんもよく知っているものです。幼い頃に手遊びを付けて歌った人も多いのではないのでしょうか。英語で歌えるようになったら、クラスメートとペアになり手遊びもつけてリズムにのって練習してみましょう。(ちなみに手遊びにはレベル1-3があります)。まずは発音の確認を兼ねてメ

ロディー無しのリズム練習から始めます。

Simple Simon

Simple Simon met a pie man,
Going to the fair;
Says Simple Simon to the pie man,
Let me taste your ware.

☆ この曲は歌詞が15連もあると言われています。ちなみに詩の中の“ware”は「商品、品物」という意味でここではpie のことです。

❖ 5 発表 (Presentation) ❖

・ これまで学習した成果を披露してみましょう。

< Description of Presentation Assignment >

Refer to the warm-up activity section and present something unique. Any materials are welcomed as long as it is performed in English. For example, singing, dancing while you sing, singing with musical instruments, telling jokes, telling funny stories with pictures, using movies and dubbing the actors' voices. The Presentation has three major purposes.

1. To present interesting material in English with good pronunciations.
2. To make eye contact with the audience.
3. To appeal to the audience and hold their interest with your presentation.

☆ You are not allowed to use your script during the presentation. It means you will need to practice many times until you memorize the material. There are no time regulations. At the end of the session, everyone in the audience will vote. Try to attract the audience with your unique ideas and your good pronunciation!

Presentation Date: _____, 20____ Entry Number:
