

Teaching Pronunciation through Self-Monitoring and Reflection

Miyoko MAASS

Abstract

Pronunciation is important in that it strongly affects oral communication, but recent research shows that it does not receive as much attention as it deserves. However, with the need to improve English communication skills in this global society, pronunciation training should have a place in higher education. This study examines the role and effects of self-monitoring and reflection in teaching pronunciation to college students. Reflections revealed that students gained better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses through the implicit pronunciation instruction and also the self-monitoring activities. Students also gained better assessment skills through pronunciation activities.

Key words: pronunciation, self-monitoring, reflection, noticing, modification

1. Introduction

The importance of pronunciation for oral communication is asserted by many researchers (Marza', 2014; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Morley, 1994; Tominaga, 2011). However, research shows that not enough emphasis has been placed on the teaching of pronunciation in EFL programs. Moedjito (2016) says that pronunciation instruction is not properly taught in Indonesia. Similarly, a study by Lin, Fan, and Chen (1995) (as cited in Wei, 2006) has found that pronunciation is not considered important among some Taiwanese teachers. According to Harmer (2001) (as cited in Gilakjani, 2016), lack of interest in English pronunciation instruction may be due to the fact that students' utterances can easily be understood by their teachers who are used to their heavily accented English.

Pronunciation is often perceived as a very difficult area to improve among L2 learners. Moedjito (2016) and Hassan (2014) report that the learners' mother tongue interference is one of the major reasons for the difficulty. Many teachers agree that Japanese students struggle with

English pronunciation. Riney and Anerson-Hsieh (1993) cite Purcell and Suter's study (1980) about predictability of non-native speakers' pronunciation accuracy based on their L1, and report that Japanese ESL speakers "fit the profile" of those who have poor English pronunciation (p. 23). In many cases Japanese students resort to substituting pronunciation based on katakana, a Japanese phonetic alphabet, for the English sounds that are lacking in their L1. As a result, the use of katakana English has prevented students from both understanding standard English and from being understood when speaking English.

Uchida and Sugimoto (2017) note that there has been a strong need for developing better pronunciation skills among pre-service junior and senior high school teachers in Japan. Recently Japanese educational reforms have emphasized English teachers' oral communication skills, and now junior and senior high school teachers are encouraged to conduct their classes in English. Therefore, developing competency in pronunciation is an important part of a teacher training program. Shibata, Yokoyama, and Tara (2008) strongly suggest that a pronunciation course with accent modification training should be a requirement for would-be teachers in the teacher training curriculum.

The important question to answer is: What would an effective pronunciation program for would-be English teachers and interested college students contain? Morley (1991) asserts that self-involvement plays an important role in pronunciation training. Just as self-involvement is important in any learning, a good pronunciation course should include activities that facilitate students' active involvement in improving their pronunciation skills. The present study examines the use of self-monitoring and reflection in pronunciation instruction and whether or not students' perceptions of their pronunciation changed over the course of the 15 weekly sessions of self-monitoring and reflection activities.

2. Review of Literature

Self-monitoring is discussed by various researchers (Morley, 1991; Yule et al., 1987; Vitanova & Miller, 2002). It is defined by Yule, Hoffman and Damico (1987) as "the ability to know when an accurate identification was being made and to recognize when a distinction was still not clear" (p. 765). In their study, students' ability to discriminate English sound contrasts as well as their self-monitoring ability were investigated. They found that the students' accuracy on phoneme discrimination did not improve much, and sometimes deteriorated, but instead their ability to self-monitor their production improved. They assert that students who develop better

self-monitoring skills seem to have more confidence in identifying sound distinctions and know when to ask for help.

Vitanova and Miller (2002) investigated student perceptions regarding which aspects of pronunciation were important to them and found that students viewed the study of basic phonological features as very important. This result seems to suggest that students feel they need to be aware of the phonological features of standard English when they monitor and correct their own speech. In other studies, self-monitoring has been found to foster student autonomy. Miller (2001) asserts that self-monitoring is an essential skill for promoting independence in pronunciation training. The role of the teacher, according to Vitanova and Miller (2002) is to help students become independent learners who can self-teach by monitoring, analyzing and modifying their own speech until they can speak English with confidence.

The importance of learner self-involvement in pronunciation training is discussed by Morley (1991). Morley notes that self-involvement techniques should be carefully guided and maintained throughout the course of the learner's language learning. According to Morley, pronunciation courses should help students involve themselves in the following four areas: "recognition of self-responsibility"; "development of self-monitoring skills"; "development of speech modification skills"; and "recognition of self-accomplishments" (PP. 503-504). Morley notes further that learners need to be given clear directions for their work, including the content, the method, and the reason for each activity. Learners should also be given instruction on how to self-monitor and how to modify their own speech. Morley also says that students can first raise self-awareness of their own speech, and then develop self-observation skills. It is important to focus on one or two target items at a time when self-monitoring. The shift from "teacher monitoring to the independent mode of self-monitoring" is the ultimate goal (p. 504). Thus, the teacher's role is to give clues or cues to help learners identify trouble areas so they can modify their speech on their own (Morley, 1991).

Smith and Beckman (2005) suggest that noticing-reformulation is an effective strategy for students to improve their pronunciation. Similar to the self-monitoring technique, noticing-reformulation calls for students to notice their errors when comparing their speech with the native speaker model. Students then modify their pronunciation of the target features based on their analysis and the native model guide. Smith and Beckman assert that developing self-awareness and noticing are important steps toward pronunciation improvement.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were eight students, including one Chinese, who were enrolled in a 15-week pronunciation course at a private university in Japan. Although 12 students were taking the course, the data of only eight students was used since four were absent and could not take part in the study in the 14th week. The participants ranged from freshmen to seniors with elementary or low intermediate English skills. None of them had received explicit pronunciation instruction before, and their knowledge of English pronunciation and the phonetic alphabet was limited.

3.2 Setting of the Study

The course was offered as an elective and met for a 90-minute session each week for 15 weeks. The goal of the course was to aim for intelligible pronunciation. Each lesson was divided into two major parts: learning phonological features and practicing with an audio model. The first part of the lesson had a special focus on problematic vowels and consonants as well as suprasegmental features such as stress and reduction, linking and thought groups, chunking, sentence stress, intonation, and so on. Learning the basic knowledge of segments was viewed as an important part of pronunciation programs in Vitanova and Miller's study (2002) and it was also stressed in this course. The retention of the target features was checked by listening and written tests administered several times during the term. In the latter half of the lesson, students worked individually, listening to an audio model of a passage and engaging in read-aloud tasks. Students chose a passage for recitation from two passages which came from the reading textbooks, *Easy True Stories*, and *Read All About It, Book 2*, and the accompanying audio model was recorded into their smart phones. To develop self-monitoring skills, students were encouraged to record their reading and compare it with the audio model. They were also encouraged to practice reading at home using the audio model. Miller (2001) says that this type of practice is effective for building independence.

During the individual reading-aloud sessions, the teacher held several consultations with each student, giving feedback and advice on specific speech features. Since the whole-class lesson had more focus on sounds that are difficult for Japanese students, special assistance was given to the Chinese student during the individual sessions. During the second half of the lesson,

students were given more responsibility to work independently, listening and imitating the model, and marking the passage for thought groups, intonation, and stress. Some students also used this session to memorize part of the passage.

The final course project was a recitation of the reading passage the students had been practicing. Two rehearsals were held before the final presentation. In the first rehearsal during week 6, only half of the passage was recited, and in the second rehearsal, the whole passage was recited. In the final presentation, the whole passage as well as their feedback on the passage was presented. The rehearsals were video-taped for self-monitoring and reflection activities, followed by self analysis.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The students' perceptions of their pronunciation were collected in the form of open-ended self-reflection. Students were asked to self reflect on their pronunciation after watching the video-recorded recitation during week 6, and again during week 14. Students wrote freely on what they thought about their own pronunciation and which areas needed improvement.

The students' pronunciation was also examined by administering self and peer assessments while viewing the video-recorded recitation during week 14. Assessment covered six areas of phonological segments and suprasegmentals such as vowels, consonants, intonation, word stress, sentence stress, and linking. Students were asked to evaluate each criteria on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being the best score. The students were instructed that 4 meant very good pronunciation that was intelligible and had the characteristics of sounds and prosodic features covered in class, but was not necessarily native-like pronunciation.

4. Results

4.1 Qualitative results

Students' self-reflections for the first rehearsal revealed very little on phonological segments:

- * I need to work on my vowels and consonants. I didn't pronounce some words correctly.
- * I failed to pronounce an "s" for the plural form.

However, there were more comments on suprasegmentals, especially intonation and stress:

- * My intonation was rather flat.
- * I need to pronounce a word at the end of a sentence with a higher pitch.

* My word stress was wrong.

Other comments were concerning non-linguistic elements such as the delivery techniques.

* I should have more eye contact.

* My voice projection was not good. It was hard to hear my voice.

* I couldn't memorize my speech.

* I should be more confident when I recite this speech.

For the second rehearsal, their reflections were more specific:

* I need to improve word and sentence stress. I have listened to the model many times, but it seems to take a long time to master the correct sentence stress.

* My pronunciation has improved, especially phonetic segments.

* My pronunciation of the /f/ sound was good. I made a conscious effort to pronounce the /f/ sound this time.

* I could discriminate different vowel sounds represented by the letter a.

* I was able to link words well.

* I paid special attention to stress and reduction, and it was well done.

* I was able to put a primary and secondary stress on words when reciting.

Students' reflections also revealed their understanding of the suprasegments in depth:

* Now I understand that the sentence stress can shift and create different meaning.

* English has very different intonation patterns from Japanese. If our intonation is flat and sounds emotionless, it is because we apply the Japanese intonation patterns when speaking English.

Their comments also extended to future learning. These comments displayed the students' motivation and self-drive to continue learning beyond the classroom and to apply what they have learned in new contexts. Vitanova and Miller (2002) called these students "independent and competent learners" (p. 3). Students commented:

* I can apply my phonological knowledge to other English studies.

* I want to continue working on my pronunciation so I can speak confidently when I travel abroad or use English at work.

* I realized that, when learning a new word, it is important to first check the

pronunciation and then learn its meaning.

Some students had difficulty memorizing their speech and this affected their pronunciation. One said:

* I was trying to memorizing the sentences, and did not have the capacity to pay special attention to the pronunciation.

Their self-reflection also revealed the metacognitive side of pronunciation study. Students seem to understand that pronunciation training is not an isolated activity but rather is connected to many other aspects of learning. One said:

* I'm glad that I was able to review the basic phonological features, but it takes more to improve my English. I'll need to improve my listening comprehension skills as well.

4.2 Quantitative Results

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the peer-evaluation and self-evaluation.

The variances of the self-assessment scores and the peer-assessment scores were tested by F-test. The results showed no significant difference in distribution, ($p=0.195$).

The 2-tailed T-test was used to examine whether or not there was a significant difference

Table1 Descriptive Statistics of the Peer- and self-evaluations

	n	M	SD
Peer-Evaluation			
Vowels	8	3.0714	.3621
Consonants	8	2.9643	.40225
Intonation	8	3.0714	.47687
Word Stress	8	2.8571	.53452
Sentence Stress	8	2.8036	.63859
Linking	8	2.8393	.56855
Self-Evaluation			
Vowels	8	2.38	.744
Consonants	8	1.75	.707
Intonation	8	1.88	.641
Word Stress	8	1.88	.641
Sentence Stress	8	1.88	.641
Linking	8	2.50	.756

Note: For peer evaluation, the average score of 7 peer-assessment was used for each of the 8 participants.

between the self-assessment score and peer-assessment scores. The results showed a significant gap in scores in four areas: consonants; intonation; word stress; linking, ($p < .05$). The students' self-assessment scores were much lower than those of their peers.

The relationship among self-evaluation, peer evaluation and teacher evaluation was also investigated by using the Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation. The results indicated that there was a significant positive association between the class average of the peer assessment and that of the teacher assessment, ($r = .90$, $n = 8$, $p < .01$). This seems to suggest that students were able to use the knowledge of pronunciation features learned in this course to assess their fellow classmates' pronunciation in much the same way as the teacher.

4.3 Discussion

The results of this study suggest that self-monitoring and reflecting are an important step toward gaining self-awareness of one's weaknesses in pronunciation. Without the development of self-awareness, it would be difficult for students to analyze the problems and make modifications to their speech. The reflections in this study shed light on the students' perceptions of their pronunciation. The first reflections revealed a general impression of their performance, and not much on their pronunciation itself. Perhaps the students were not yet ready to "notice" their problems with certain phonological features of English at this time, and therefore, paid more attention to something more obvious such as intonation. In order to "notice" problems, students need the basic knowledge of English pronunciation. This was more apparent in the second reflections, as it showed more insightful awareness of their problems in detail. The logical conclusion is that students' self-monitoring skills have significantly improved through the pronunciation instruction and also self-monitoring activities in class, and therefore their perceptions of their pronunciation changed greatly.

The pronunciation instruction may also have facilitated the students' ability to assess their fellow classmates' pronunciation. The results showed that the peer assessment strongly correlated to the teacher assessment. It seems to suggest that the students were using similar criteria and information as the teacher when they assessed their fellow students' recitations. On the other hand, there was a huge discrepancy between the self-assessment and the teacher assessment. All the students evaluated themselves much lower than the teacher. Similar findings were reported by Brown (2005), who explained that Japanese often consider being average positive, and when self-evaluating they seem rather modest. This seems to suggest that the self-assessment alone may not be accurate since Japanese students tend to be more humble

towards themselves during self-assessment. Therefore, when investigating students' perceptions of their pronunciation, mixed methods such as self and peer assessments as well as reflections should be used.

5. Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate Japanese college students' perceptions of their English pronunciation. The implicit pronunciation teaching together with self-monitoring and reflection activities during the individual sessions resulted in students' increased awareness towards their own strengths and weaknesses in the area of pronunciation. The results of this study suggest the need for offering a pronunciation course in college which combines instruction of the basic English phonological features with speech modification through self-monitoring and reflections. The role of the teacher in such a pronunciation course should be that of a facilitator, to help students become independent learners who can seek learning opportunities in and outside of the class and eventually apply the acquired knowledge to communication outside of the class.

References

- Brown, R. A. (2005). The Paradox of Japanese Self-Esteem. *Information & Communication Studies*, 32. Department of Information Sciences, Bunkyo University, Chigasaki, Japan.
- Gilakjani, A. P. (2016). English Pronunciation Instruction: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Research in English Education*. Vol. 1, No. 1.
- Gilakjani, A. P, and Sabouri, N. B. (2016). Why is English Pronunciation Ignored by EFL Teachers in Their Classes? *International Journal of English Linguistics*; Vol. 6, No. 6.
- Hassan, E. M. I. (2014). Pronunciation Problems: A Case Study of English Language Students at Sudan University of Science and Technology. *English Language and Literature Studies*; Vol. 4, No. 4.
- Marza', N. E. (2014). Pronunciation and Comprehension of Oral English in the English as a Foreign Language Class: Key Aspects, Students' Perceptions and Proposals. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 262-273.
- Miller, S. (2001). Self-Monitoring, Self-Help, and the Route to Intelligible Speech. *The CATESOL Journal*, 13.1, 183-199.
- Moedjito. (2016). The Teaching of English Pronunciation: Perceptions of Indonesian School and University Students. *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 9, No. 6.
- Morley, J. (1991). The Pronunciation Component in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3.
- . (1994). A Multidimensional Curriculum Design for Speech-Pronunciation Instruction. In J. Morley (Ed.) *Pronunciation Pedagogy and theory: New Views, New Directions*. *Pantagraph: Bloomington*.

- Riney, T. & Anderson-Hsieh, J. (1993). Japanese Pronunciation of English. *JALT Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 21-36.
- Smith, J. & Beckmann, B. (2005). Improving Pronunciation through Noticing-Reformulation Tasks. Proceedings of the Phonetics Teaching and Learning Conference 2005. Retrieved September 1, 2018, from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.590.344&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Suter, R. (1976). Predictors of pronunciation accuracy in second language learning. *Language Learning* 26, 233-253.
- Tominaga, Y. (2011). An Analysis of English Pronunciation of Japanese Learners: From the Viewpoint of EIL. *Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 15(2), 45-57.
- Uchida, Y. and Sugimoto, J. (2017). A Survey of Pronunciation Instruction by Japanese Teachers of English: Phonetic Knowledge and Teaching Practice. *Journal of the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology*, Vol. 14, 65-75.
- Vitanova, G. & Miller, A. (2002). Reflective Practice in Pronunciation Learning. *The Internet TESOL Journal*, 8(1). Retrieved September 1, 2018, from <http://iteslj.org>.
- Wei, W. (2006). A Literature Review on Strategies for Teaching Pronunciation. Retrieved September 1, 2018, from pdfs.semanticscholar.org.
- Yule, G., Hoffman, P. & Damico, J. (1987). Paying Attention to Pronunciation: The role of self-monitoring in perception. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 765-768.
- 柴田祐介・横山志保・多良静也 (2008) 「音声指導に関する教員の実態調査」『紀要』(四国英語教育学会) 28, 49-55.

自己モニタリングと振り返りを通じた発音指導

メイス みよ子

抄 録

発音は、コミュニケーションに影響を及ぼすという点において重要であるが、最近の研究によると、あまり注目されていないことが分かった。しかし、このグローバル社会では英語コミュニケーション能力の向上が求められ、高等教育においても発音の指導は重要である。この研究では、大学生への発音指導において、自己モニタリングと振り返りの役割と効果を検証する。暗示的な発音指導や自己モニタリングの活動を通し、学生は自分の発音の長所や弱点がより良く理解できるようになったことが振り返りで明らかになった。また発音練習が評価スキルの向上に有効であったことが示唆された。

キーワード：発音，自己モニタリング，振り返り，気づき，修正