ON CULTIVATING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: FROM THE PHONETIC VIEWPOINT

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1. INTRODUCTION

This is a brief sketch of the *minimum essential elements of pronunciation* which are considered necessary for cultivating the communicative competence of the Japanese learner of English at junior high school level. [1] The aim of this paper, therefore, is mainly to present for actual classroom teaching what constitutes the minimal phonetic aspect of English and to discuss some of the teaching points and problems which the junior high school teacher kas to face and deal with.

1.1. Definitions

Language is for communication and this means that we learn and use language in order to communicate. But what *is* communication ? Communication is defined as "the transmission of information (a 'message') between a source and receiver using a signalling system," [2] or as "Broadly : the establishment of a social unit from individuals, by the shared usage of language or signs : the sharing of common sets of rules, for various goal-seeking activities." [3] It is obvious from these quotes, therefore, that *human communication is the reciprocal process in which the idea or thought (a message) of the speaker (or the sender) is transmitted to the hearer (or the receiver) through the means of the shared social convention called language.*

1.2. Aim of the TEFL/TESOL Teacher

Especially in the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language (TEFL or TESOL, henceforth TEFL for convenience), therefore, the goal of the teacher is to have the student acquire the ability to communicate : the goal is "for the student to be able to interact freely with others : to understand what others wish to communicate in the broadest sense, and to be able to convey to others what they [the students] themselves wish to share (whether as a reaction to a communication or as an original contribution to the exchange)." [4] We call this ability "communicative competence" on the part of the student. Tench states that the following six linguistic factors should be involved in what we have just called "communicative competence" : *grammar, lexis, style, function, discourse,* and *pronunciation.* [5]

1.3. Phonetic Viewpoint on "Communicative Competence"

In other words, the aim of the TEFL teacher is, specifically, to have the student acquire the above-mentioned six factors. All of them should be involved *simultaneously* in good communicative competence of the student. The lack of any one of them in the process of transmitting and receiving a message hinders the establishment of good communication. When oral communication or speech is considered, it becomes obvious that pronunciation is the

primary of the six factors and, therefore, the fundamental factor among them : language is conducted primarily on the spoken, and not written, level, and we cannot make ourselves understood unless we have a good pronunciation.

What does it mean to have *a good pronunciation* in a second or foreign language and what actually constitutes the concept of "a good pronunciation"? For the TEFL student, the *ideal* aim of pronunciation *can* be stated as the one that is as close to the native English pronunciation as possible. [6] For most of the general language learners, however, it suffices to aim at "a comfortably intelligible pronunciation" which "can be understood with little or no conscious effort on the part of the [native English] listener." [7] Therefore, a good pronunciation is defined as *an intelligible pronunciation with reasonable accuracy and fluency in segmental and suprasegmental elements.*

2. PRESENTATION

2. 1. Fundametal Factors of Pronunciation

Now that the aim of the TEFL teacher and the student has been set out, it is time to specify the fundamental factors of pronunciation for cultivating the communicative competence of the TEFL student. They can be itemized as follows :

(1) Acquiring reasonably correct pronunciation of English segmental sounds (vowels & consonants) (paying particular attention to the confusing ones among the English sounds, and with the correponding Japanese sounds).

(2) Acquiring the ability to handle correctly the suprasegmental (or prosodic) features of English (e. g., accentuation, rhythm, and intonation).

2. 2. Inventory

This paper is concerned with the minimum essential elements of pronunciation, and from that point of view, the following correspond to the above-mentioned two factors :

(1) *Segmental sounds*

　(A) *Vowels*

　　(a) *simple vowels*

　　　/ i, e, æ, a, o, u, ə, ɚ /[8] as in {bit, bet, bat, not, talk, wood, butt, hurt}.

　　(b) *vowls+glide*

　　　/ iy, ey, ay, oy, aw, ow, uw /[9] as in {beat, bait, buy, boy, bow, boat, boo}.

　(B) *Consonants*

　　(a) stops : / p, b, t, d, k, g /

　　(b) fricatives : / f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ /

　　(c) affricates : / tʃ, dʒ /

　　(d) nasals : / m, n, ŋ /

　　(e) lateral : / l /

　　(f) glottal : / h /

　　(g) glides : / y, [10] w, r /

(2) *Suprasegmental features*

  (A) *Accentuation*[11] : strong vs. weak syllables

    (a) word : bóok; téach·er; to·dáy; còn·ver·sá·tion

    (b) phrase : on the táble; at áll; in óther words

    (c) sentence : Súmmer has góne; Cóme and sée us

  (B) *Rhythm* : stress-timed[12]

    (a) expansion

Dógs	éat	bónes.
The dógs	will éat	the bónes.
The dógs	will be éating	the bónes.
The dógs	will have éaten	the bónes.

    (b) different sentences with the same numbers of stress

A drúgstore's	the pláce	to have lúnch.
We shall sóon	finish úp	for the seméster.
Júne	is a níce	mónth.
We were enchánted	by her intélligent	conversátion.

  (C) *Intonation* : vocal pitch movement or change

    minimum intonation types[13] : grammatical only

      1) High Fill (/ `yes /) : statements, questions beginning with question words

      2) High Rise (/ ′yes /) : questions asking for something to be repeated or clarified

      3) Low Rise (/ ˌyes /) : yes/no questions, lists (up to the last item), conversation-oiler (encouraging the other person to go on)

      4) Fall-Rise (/ ˇyes /) : corrections, polite contradictions

  (D) *Emphasis and Prominence* : contextual variation

    How are you ? ··········· How are yőu ?

    Put it őn the desk !

3. DISCUSSION : Teaching Points

It is true that both the segmental sounds and suprasegmental features listed above work together to create the impression of the Englishness of pronunciation, but recently more attention has been paid to the latter features because it has become recognized that the suprasegmental features have an overriding effect in creating the Englishness. [14]

In classroom situations, therefore, the suprasegmental features of English should be regarded as more important than the segmental sounds, although due attention should be paid, of course, to each segmental sound. [15]

3. 1. Difference of Rhythm Patterns between Japanese and English

As has often been stated, most characteristic difference between Japanese and English is

the difference in rhythm patterns : the syllable-timed rhythm of Japanese and the stress-timed rhythm of English :

(1) 'あすははれるとおもいます'

  (A) / a·su·wa ha·re·ru·to o·mo·i·ma·su /

  (B) / asuwa hareruto omoimasu /

(2) 'I think it will be fine tomorrow'

  (A) / áy θiŋk ít wíl bíy fáyn tumárow /

  (B) / ay θiŋk itlbi fáyn təmárow /

In both (1) and (2) above, (A) shows an over-careful pronunciation and (B) a normal pronunciation. In (1), although pitch patterns are different, each syllable retains the syllable structure C_iV_j(e. g., / a /$=C_0V_1$; / su /$=C_1V_1$). Each syllable is pronounced in an almost equal length of time. Moreover, pitch does not affect vowel quality phonologically. In (2), on the other hand, pronouncing each word clearly with stress destroys the normal English rhythm and causes undue attention to the sound rather than meaning. In a normal utterance, only the syllables / θiŋk /, / fayn /, /-ma-/ are stressed and the other syllables are pronounced quickly and weakly. As a result, they become either crushed together (/ itlbi /) or obscured (/ ay /, / bi /, / tə-/ and /-row /). In English, vowel quality and stress are so closely connected that the number of syllables are irrelevant to the creation of rhythm impression. [16]

In classroom teaching, therefore, neglecting this difference of rhythm patterns causes the greatest difficulty in acquiring a good pronunciation of English. Alternating stressed and unstressed syllables smoothly, and pronouncing stressed vowels clearly and unstressed vowels weakly and obscurely is the most important thing.

3. 2. Stress Placement Principles

Based on the discussion above, the next problem is where to place stresses in an utterance. The following are the two basic rules of stress placement principles.

(A) *Content words are usually stressed.*

  (a) nouns : Japán, Gód, téxtbook,

  (b) main verbs (exceptions : *be, have*) : gíve, gét, contínue,

  (c) adjectives : góod, bád, níce, béautiful,

  (d) adverbs : úp, dówn nów, quíte,

  (e) demonstratives : thís, thát thése, thóse.

  (f) interrogatives : whó, whát, whích, hów,

(B) *Function words are usually unstressed.*

  (a) pronouns : you, I, we, they,

  (b) relative pronouns : who, that, which,

  (c) auxiliaries : shall, will, can, may,

  (d) connectives[17] : and, but, or,

  (e) prepositions : [17]with, in, at, to,

  (f) possessive adjectives : my, his, your,

  (g) articles : a, an, an, the.

(h)　*one* used as a noun-substitute : the blue one,

(i)　verbs *be* and *have* in non-final position : It's there,

3. 3.　Thought-group and Pausing Principles[18]

A sentence can be divided into thought-groups, depending on the speed of pronunciation or on the clarity of meaning. Pauses fall between these thought-groups. Usually grammatical connections within a sentence decide where the pauses occur. It should also be noticed that pitch height is usually retained within a thought-group, thus affecting intonation. The below are the basic principles for pauses : [19]

(A)　*No* pause(s) is/are made within (or between) the following :

(a)　NP(noun phrase) and/or Aux(auxiliary)+V(verb)

my beautiful flowers / the United States of America; will have to come / must have done it

(b)　VP(verb phrase : V+NP; V+Complement)

made a box / took Tom and me;

are our classmates / is called Tom

(c)　Prepositional Phrase

in front of the garden / in order to get up early

(d)　Connectives+Sentence

It is fine, : but it is cold. / I bought a watch, : which I gave to John. / It is so cold : that I can't sleep.

(e)　Pronoun+Verb

They said so / It is / He would go

(B)　Pause(s) is/are usually made after a comma (but not always)

When we reached there, : we found it gone. /

Mr. Kato, : do you like her ?

Fortunately, : he came home soon.

3. 4.　Intonation

In 2. 2. (C) were identified four essential intonation types for grammatical functions. It is possible to add a fifth type, Rise-Fall (/ˇyes /), but the occurrence of this type is rather rare and can be neglected in junior high school teaching situations. Also, there is another function in intonation, the attitudinal. [20] The attitudinal function of intonation is closely related to emphatic stress or prominence. It is preferable to touch upon this function at an advanced level. At the elementary level, however, it would be better first to concentrate on the four grammatical types. It would be unwise to expose the learner to the complexities or intricacies of actual intonational varieties from the beginning. [21]

3. 5.　Problem segmental sounds of English for production

(A)　*Simple vowels*

Strictly speaking, all English vowels present a problem to the Japanese speaker. There are two vowels, however, which present the greatest difficulties. In order of difficulty, they are / ɚ / and / æ /. [22] The rest of the simple vowels can be reasonably intelligible,

in a broad sense, with slight modification to the corresponding Japanese vowels.

(B) *Vowels with glide*

These vowels are usually calld "diphthongs" in phonetics, and their most characteristic feature is the movement (gliding) from the first element to the second, the second element being the driection or the target point and not the destination to be reached. This is effected by stressing the first element, o. g., / iʸ/ or / éʸ/. The Japanese speaker tends to put equal stress on both elements, carrying over the habit of Japanese. This should be strictly avoided.

(C) *Vowels that should be distinguished in production*

The following are the vowel pairs to be distinguished when pronounced by a Japanese speaker of English.

/ iy / ⋯ / i /(beat ⋯ bit);	/ i / ⋯ / e /(bit ⋯ bet);
/ e / ⋯ / æ /(bet ⋯ bat);	/ æ / ⋯ / a /(pat ⋯ pot);
/ a / ⋯ / ə /(hot ⋯ hut);	/ a / ⋯ / ɚ /(heart ⋯ hurt);
/ a / ⋯ / o /(cot ⋯ caught);	/ o / ⋯ / ə /(caught ⋯ cut);
/ o / ⋯ / ow /(caught ⋯ coat);	/ u / ⋯ / uw /(pull ⋯ pool);
/ u / ⋯ / ə /(look ⋯ luck);	/ u / ⋯ / ɚ /(look ⋯ lurk)

(D) *Consonants*

All the English consonants are characterized by stronger breath force (especially when syllable or word initial) than the Japanese ones, and, therefore, they should be pronounced, above all, very forcefully in English. Particularly difficult consonants for the Japanese speaker are : / f /(*f*eel); /v/(*v*ery); / θ /(*th*ink); / ð /(*th*is); / r /(*r*ight); /l/(*l*ight); /ʒ/(mea*s*ure); / w /(*w*oman); and / y /(*y*es).

3. 6. **Problem segmental sounds in aural discrimination**[23]

(A) *Vowels*

The vowels which are perceptually similar to the Japanese / a /ᴶ seem to present the greatest difficulties. In order they are, / ə / ⋯ / a /; / ə / ⋯ / æ /(run … ran); / e / ⋯ / æ /; / ə / ⋯ / o /; / æ / ⋯ / a /.[24]

(B) *Consonants*

The perceptual difficulties of English consonants differ according to the positions they occupy in a syllable (initial ⋯ medial ⋯ final), but, on the whole, fricatives seem to be most difficult to discriminate.[25] Problem consonants are the following in order :

/ v / ⋯ / b /(vat-bat; savor-saber; calves-cabs)

/ f / ⋯ / h /(feel-heal; food-who'd)

/ ð / ⋯ / z /(clothing-closing; sheathe-she's)

/ r / ⋯ / l /(wrong-long; near-nil; crew-clue)

/ ʒ / ⋯ / dʒ /(seizure-sieger)

/ θ / ⋯ / s /(thought-sought; path-pass)

/ s / ⋯ / ʃ /(sip-ship; sealed-shield)

/ n / ⋯ / ŋ /(sinner-singer; run-rung)

/ m / ⋯ / ŋ /(ram-rang; rim-ring)
/ r / ⋯ / d /(sharing-shedding; carry-caddy)
/ g / ⋯ / ŋ /(tug-tongue; bagging-banging)

4. Recapitulation

Actual phonetic phenomea are much more complex than those presented here, and at an advanced level more detailed treatment should be put into practice, e. g., positional variation of vowel length [siː]⋯[siːd]⋯[siˑt]; allophonic differences of plosive consonants [pʰ], [p], [pˑ]; and sound change with assimilation [d]+[j]→[dʒ], [s]+[ʃ]→[ʃʃ]. However, this paper has exclusively concerned itself with the minimum essential elements of pronunciation at an elementary level, and if these things are taught and learned correctly, we can say that we have laid the foundation for the cultivation of communicative competence in the Japanese learner of English.

Nevertheless, the most important thing is not just presenting and setting up the minimum essential elements of pronunciation for use. The success of the student's mastering these elements and acquiring a good pronunciation depends on the teacher's constant efforts *and* the student's willingness to learn and perseverance to practice. This is (and should be) the key to the whole problem.

NOTES

1) This paper is based on the lecture given to junior high school teachers of English at the Miyazaki Prefectural Training Center on September, 13 th, 1984. The original title was 「Communicability を育てる指導」 ("Teaching to Cultivate Communicability").

2) D. Crystal, *The First Dictionary of Linguistics & Phonetics* (Andre Deutsch, 1980), p. 70.

3) C. Cherry (*On Human Communication* (The MIT Press, 1978), Appendix, p. 305.

4) W. M. Rivers & M. S. Temperley, *A Practical Guide to the Teaching of English as a second or foreign language* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 3—4.

5) According to P. Tench, *Pronunciation Skills*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981, p, 2., *grammar* means the "formulation of the message according to the grammatical rules of the language"; *lexis*, making sense of the message with the right choice of vocabulary, idiom and syntactic alternatives"; *style*, "appropriating the message to the situation, bearing in mind such matters as who you are speaking to and where"; *function*, "according the message with the conventional expression of the particular purpose the speaker has in mind, e. g., apologizing, thanking, complaining, etc"; *discourse*, "fitting in the message satisfactorily with what has gone before"; *pronunciation*, "pronouncing the message reasonably well."

6) In his book, *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* (3 rd ed. : Eeward Arnold, 1980, p. 304), A. C. Gimson talks about the case of the foreign teacher. He says, "the *foreign teacher* of English constitutes a special case. He has the obligation to present his students with as faithful a model of English pronunciation as possible. In the first place, and *particularly if he is dealing with young pupils, his students will imitate a bad pronuncition as they will a good one;* and, secondly, if he is using illustrative recorded material, his own pronunciation must not diverge markedly from the native model." (italics added)

7) D. Abercrombie, *Problems and Principles in Language Study* (2 nd ed. : Longman, 1963) in Tench. *ibid.*, p. 17. See also Gimson, *ibid.*, p. 303.

8) Corresponding IPA symbols in narrow transcription are : [ɪ, ɛ, æ, ɑ, ɔ, ʊ, ʌ/ə, ɝ].

9) Corresponding IPA symbols in narrow transcription are : [i, e, aɪ, ɔɪ, aʊ, oʊ, u].

10) The corresponding IPA symbol is : [j].

11) For convenience, this paper follows the convention of placing accent marks (/ ′ /, / ` /) on the vowel letter of the accented syllable.

12) K. L. Pike first used this term in his *The Intonation of American English* (The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1945, p. 34 ff.). He says, "The units [the rhythm units] tend to follow one another in such a way that the lapse of time between the beginning of their prominent syllables is somewhat uniform," and "Because its length [the length of a rhythm unit] is largely dependent upon the presence of one strong stress, rather than upon the specific number of its syllables, it may conveniently be labelled a STRESS-TIMED rhythm unit." On the other hand, the type of rhythm which is dependent on a specific number of syllables, e. g., Japanese or Spanish, is labelled "SYLLABLE-TIMED" rhythm. The examples are taken from C. H. Prator & B. W. Robinett, *Manual of American English Pronunciation* (3 rd ed. : Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1957), p. 37.

13) Intonation analysis differs generally according to whether it is American pitch level analysis or British tune (or tone) group analysis. The British notational system is used here for convenience.

14) See, for example, B. Haycraft, *The Teaching of Pronunciation* (Longman, 1971, p. 4), "I have found the most useful and stimulating order to be : *first*, meaningful sentence stress within a context, accompanied by relevant expression i. e. basic intonation; *second*, help with the difficult and important sounds."; Gimson, *ibid.*, p. 305, "The stress-timed rhythm of English utterance ... with the related obscuration of weak syllables is the prime distinguishing feature of the language's pronunciation, ... For all learners, accentuation must provide the foundation on which any pronunciation course is built."; Rivers & Temperley, *ibid.*, pp. 160—161, "..., rhythm and intonation have a striking effect on the articulation of segmental elements. Use of correct English stress and pitch patterns will help to improve the production of vowels and consonants.", "The use of the appropriate rhythm and intonation patterns makes students' speech sound much less foreign and more English, frequently compensating for other faults of pronunciation."; Hubbard, et. al., *A Training Course for TEFL* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1983, p. 209), "Problems of sound formation often arise because of distorted, exaggerated stress patterns. Many learners tend to produce utterances of the type, 'GIVE. IT. TO. HIM.' instead of, 'GIVE it to him."; Pike, *ibid.*, p. 107., "... no pronunciation of English would sound natural unless the intonation were fairly acceptable. Even with satisfactory consonants and vowels, phrases with incorrect melody sounded foreign."

15) Gimson gives an interesting example in his book, *ibid.*, p. 304. He writes that at a dinner table in a restaurnt, it is perfectly intelligible if someone pronounces the word *potatoes* like [bəˈdeːdoːz], but that [ˈbɑdeːdoːz] is not. (Gimson's notation)

16) It is often said, therefore, that utterances with equal numbers of stress are pronounced in an almost equal length of time. This is called the "isochronism" of English rhythm. Instrumental experiments have revealed, however, that this is rather dubious and not always observed : utterances with a greater number of syllables usually take more time. (cf. my paper, "Isochronism Hypothesis of English Speech-Rhythm and the Japanese Learner of English", Master's Thesis; Sophia Univ. Graduate School of Languages and Linguistics, 1982) Isochronism should be considered as either *psychological* (the speaker's intention) or *perceptual* norm that underlies English rhythm. It is not always a physical reality that is adhered to. Pedagogically speaking, however, it should be incorporated into actual practice in order to have the learner become aware of the isochronous *tendency* of English rhythm.

17) Polysyllabic connectives and prepositions are sometimes stressed, depending on the rhythm of a sentence, e. g., howéver, behínd, becáuse, etc.

18) Somtimes the term "thought-group" is also called "sense-group," "breath-group," or "tone group." Pike's "rhythm unit" in *ibid.*, p. 34, means more or less the same thing. What is meant by" pause" here also corresponds to his "tentative pause," *ibid.*, p. 31. Notice that this section concerns how to read written text out loud, since junior high school classes are based on a textbook. Therefore, the technique of reading the text aloud is an important thing to be considered. Also, in a previous paper of mine, "On Teaching English Stress & Rhythm," Bulletin of Kagoshima Junshin Junior College, Vol. 10, 1980, I agreed with Halliday's system of tone analysis (M. A. K. Halliday, "The Tones of English" in *Phonetics in Linguistics : A Book of Readings* (eds. W. E. Jones & J. Laver), Longman, 1973). According to that, for example, the sentence "The boys will need some money" would be

marked : //ˏThe /ˈboys will / ˈneed some / ˈmoney//. Halliday presupposes that each tone unit has a strong syllable with which it starts and it continues up to the syllable prior to the next strong syllable. For a tone unit which does not contain a strong syllable, he presupposes a "zero" stress (/ˏ/). This analysis is consistent in itself phonologically but is rather arbitrary and often incompatible with grammatical divisions into "thought-groups." The notion of "thought-groups" is used in this paper because at the junior high school level it is better not to separate the phonological level from the grammatical level.

19) Obviously the following principles are far from complete for analyzing the actual pause phenomena, but they should be considered the basic ones. Examples are taken, with slight change, from T. Torii & N. Kaneko, 『英語発音の指導』, Taishukan, 1969, pp. 136—137. See, for more detailed description, N. Okuda, 『英語のイントネーション』, Eiwa Shuppan, 1975.

20) One example of the attitudinal function of intonation is exemplified in the following example (*A Training Course*, p. 220) :

    (I'd like a drink.)

    (a) You ʹwould ? (simply a conversation-oiler, that has the additional function of asking confirmation of the statement)

    (b) ˈYou ˋwould. (Here annoyance and criticism is conveyed. The implication is one of : "Well, that's just typical of you. You always want a drink.")

21) To give just one example of the complexities, the following sentence can be interpreted in two ways according to differences in intonation and pause :

    (a) He didn't ˋcome : because of the ˋmoney. (money deterred him)

    (b) He didn't ˈcome because of the ˇmoney. (because of some other reason)

22) The vowel / i / (IPA symbol [ɪ]) *can* be listed here, but the readers should be reminded that the main concern of this paper is the *minimum essential* elements. From that point of view, it can be said that the difficulty of the vowel / i / is not always so great as to become *totally unintelligible.*

23) The following description is based on a perception test conducted at Miyazaki University in 1983. 153 students took part in the test. The format used was "Test of Aural Perception in English for Japanese Students" (R. Lado & F. D. Andrade, English Language Institute, Univ. of Michigan, 1950).

24) See also Y. Takefuta, 『日本人英語の科学』, Kenkyusha, 1982, p. 87. He gives the following pairs as problem vowels for aural discrimination; / i-ɪ, e-æ, e-aɪ, ɛ-i, æ-a, o-a, ʌ-u / (his transcription).

25) See also Takefuta, *ibid.,* p, 86. He gives / v, θ, ð, f, l / as particularly difficult consonants in aural discrimination.