Comparative and Analytic Approaches to the Factors Generating the Differences in the Manner of Articulation of English Complex Sentences

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The appropriate prosodic information facilitates the ambiguous sentence processing in the first language (e.g., Cutler and Norris, 1988; Kjelgaard and Speer, 1999). On the other hand, Hirai, Ikuma, and Yokokawa (2010) provided evidence that Japanese EFL learners might not be able to utilize the prosodic information when processing English syntactic ambiguous sentences. They indicated that one of the limitations in the sentence processing may be caused by the limited perceptual ability of phonological features. If intermediate proficiency Japanese EFL learners fail to process syntactic and semantic information and acoustic clues in total, how do they perceive the phonetic representation and articulate English ambiguous sentences?

To answer this question, Ikuma and Hirai (2010) examined the production of English ambiguous sentences by native and non-native speakers. The difference between phonetic characteristics produced by native speakers and those produced by Japanese EFL learners reveals some characteristic prosodic features that might lead to foreign accents or non-fluency. However, since the number of the data obtained in Ikuma, et al. (2010) was limited, it could only provide the tendency of the prosodic features which are peculiar to the Japanese EFL learners.

This study is designed to clarify the prosodic features of Japanese EFL learners with an adequate number of the participants producing English syntactic ambiguous sentences. Native speakers of English and Japanese students produced the sentences under the following two conditions: (1) at the normal speed with the natural prosodic features, (2) with the prosodic variation for easier comprehension.

We examined our data in light of three major points of view: the articulation time, the duration of the pause, and the pitch range. These would be predictors to the non-fluency or the foreign accentedness (Riggenbach, 2000). These results derived through these comparisons suggest that further training in speaking for Japanese EFL learners would be necessary.

Learning Intercultural Communication with International Students

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The presenter will introduce an EFL university classroom where nineteen Japanese students, and eleven international students (four Germans, two Canadians, and one each from America, China, Vietnam, Slovakia and France) will learn intercultural communication together for the whole semester. The classes were originally intended for Japanese sophomores, but the instructor decided to include international students so that Japanese students could communicate with students from different countries since the content of the classes was intercultural communication. The instructor designed classroom activities with two things in mind.

1. The cultural differences of the Japanese and international students and,
2. The drastically different levels of language ability.