HOKUGA 北海学園学術情報リポジトリ

学校法人北海学園
北 海 学 園 大 学
北 海 商 科 大 学

タイトル	Pronunciation Teaching and Research: Inclusion and Exclusion
著者	Yonesaka, Suzanne M.
引用	年報新人文学(15): 2-7
発行日	2018-12-25

Hokkai-Gakuen Organization of Knowledge Ubiquitous through Gaining Archives.

Foreword［巻頭言］

Pronunciation Teaching and Research: Inclusion and Exclusion

Suzanne M. Yonesaka

When I first came to Japan, judging from the advertisements for English teachers, there was definitely a hierarchy regarding the preferred accent. Although speakers of American or Canadian English were acceptable, speakers of British English were highly esteemed, especially those who used BBC pronunciation. Speakers of Australian and New Zealand English were a last resort, and speakers of other varieties such as Singapore English or Indian English were not even in the running. This hierarchy was a hyper-real reflection of concepts that were fundamental to the English language teaching world at that time: first, the concept of native speaker/nonnative speaker; and second, the concept that native speakers are the ideal, and perhaps only possible, models. This state of affairs also influenced pronunciation teaching and research: both in the classroom and in the research laboratory, native speakers provided the yardstick as to whether an utterance was well-formed and well-pronounced. However, at the same time, a revolution was underway. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the linguist Braj Kachru (1932–2016) introduced his paradigm of the three circles of English, a paradigm that strongly influenced the way teachers thought about World Englishes. Imagine three concentric circles. The Inner Circle represents places such as the UK, the US, and Australia, where English has a traditional historical base and is now used as a primary language. The middle circle, called the Outer Circle, represents places such as India, Malaysia, and Kenya, where English serves as a lingua franca among ethnic groups and where it may also be the language of higher education and government functions. The outermost circle, the Expanding Circle, includes countries such as Japan and China where English has no historical or governmental role, but is widely studied and is used for international communication. Despite criticisms, this model is useful for helping learners and teachers move beyond the false dichotomy of native speaker/nonnative speaker.

A parallel development has occurred in the teaching and research of pronunciation as well. For many years, the teaching and research of pronunciation has been influenced by the nativeness principle, which holds that it is possible and desirable to achieve native-like pronunciation (Levis, 2005). This principle is clearly grounded in the native speaker/nonnative speaker dichotomy and on the notion that the native speaker is the only possible model for pronunciation learners.

More recently, after decades of research, notably by Tracey Derwing and Murray Munro in Canada, the teaching of pronunciation has begun to be dominated by the intelligibility principle which claims that learners need to be understandable. Although many learners want to get rid of their accents, research (e.g. Munro & Derwing, 1999) shows that intelligibility does not always correlate with accent. An accent is a marker of belonging to a given social group, which is one reason why many learners keep their accents. The intelligibility principle also claims that intelligibility is always co-constructed with the listener. Just as “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” , intelligibility is in the ear of the listener as well as in the mouth of the speaker, an idea that fits our understanding of how speakers and interlocuters work together to negotiate meaning. Derwing and Munro also proposed the concept of comprehensibility, which measures how easy or difficult it is for the listener to make out what the speaker is saying, in other words, how much effort is involved. These three concepts—intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accent—along with the idea that pronunciation is a two-way street, have helped trigger a flood of pronunciation research around the world.

Pronunciation instruction and research has traditionally involved (in Kachru's terms) the combination of Expanding Circle speakers + Inner Circle listeners. Native-speaker researchers and native-speaker classroom teachers judge the intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accent of learners from Expanding Circle countries. However, the intelligibility principle has motivated a large number of studies exploring how intelligibility and comprehensibility are affected by other combinations of speaker and listener, such as Outer Circle speaker + Inner Circle listener, or Inner Circle speaker + Expanding

Circle listener. In particular, research within the English as a Lingua Franca framework has begun to examine the Expanding Circle speaker + Expanding Circle listener combination. Such research looks at how speakers and listeners with different mother-tongue backgrounds (for example, a Chinese student and a Saudi Arabian student in an ESL classroom in Canada) negotiate and achieve intelligible pronunciation (e.g. Jenkins, 2000; Matsuura, 2007; Sicola, 2009).

What about pronunciation instruction and research in Expanding Circle contexts such as Japan, where learners share the same mother-tongue? First, when Japanese learners speak English together, it is predicted that convergence—the gradual accommodation of speech features to those of the interlocutor—can occur. This may lead to increased intelligibility between the two learners, but it can also reinforce the Japanese accent (Walker, 2005; Walker & Zoghbor, 2015). More research is needed to discover teaching techniques that will minimize such convergence. Second, Japanese learners need the opportunity to use English in a Lingua Franca context, that is, to give and receive pronunciation feedback with other learners who are not Japanese. Fortunately, this can be accomplished through technology, for example through the many websites that feature speakers of English as a Lingua Franca and through Skype sessions with students in other Asian countries. Japanese learners must use the technology that is available to get massive amounts of listening input from a variety of speakers from all three Circles so that they will be better prepared for a globalized world. The effect of technology on learner pronunciation is another area of focus in pronunciation research.

Finally, teachers will always be a pronunciation model for students. If Japanese teachers of English know from personal experience that their speech is intelligible to Japanese learners, then they can be confident that they can act as pronunciation models for their students (Walker & Zoghbor, 2015). In addition, Japanese teachers of English in elementary and secondary classrooms should provide feedback on pronunciation; unfortunately, research tends to indicate that junior-high and senior-high Japanese learners want pronunciation feedback, but receive little. English teachers need training on when and how to provide pronunciation feedback, and perhaps more importantly, they need the confidence to do so. Research is also exploring teachers’ and learners’ beliefs and attitudes toward pronunciation.

If we think of the humanities as a huge ancient tree, the teaching of pronunciation is only a twig on the very young branch of applied linguistics. Due in some part to the shift away from the nativeness principle to the intelligibility principle, this twig has begun to blossom. The nativeness principle excludes nonnative pronunciation models, the intelligibility principle includes them. The nativeness principle tells learners what they cannot pronounce, the intelligibility principle builds on what they can. By including rather than excluding, not only pronunciation teaching and research, but other branches of the humanities continue to thrive, despite the political forces that threaten inclusion in the world today.

（ヨネサカ　スザンヌ・北海学園大学人文学部教授）