国際日本学研究科

修士学位請求論文要旨

〔論文題名〕

An Investigation of Relationships between English Pronunciation and Motivation in the Case of Japanese EFL Learners

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This study investigated relationships between English pronunciation and motivation of Japanese EFL learners. In this paper, “pronunciation” is used in accordance with the definition which is used in Isaacs and Trofimovich (2017). That is, pronunciation is defined as individual consonant and vowel sounds, which are called segments and as features that span a larger unit than a single segment, such as word stress, rhythm, and intonation, which are called suprasegmentals or prosody. In Japan, pronunciation might not be needed for entrance exams, compared with grammar and vocabulary. However, it has been said that Japanese people, who learn English as a foreign language, should learn English pronunciation to some extent because phonetic features of Japanese and English are quite different from each other. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) (2018) states that high school students should learn language elements such as language sounds and idioms so that they can use them in actual communication.

In order to learn and teach pronunciation, learners’ individual differences should be considered because whether or not learners can acquire better pronunciation depends on their motivation to acquire it. To implement this study, the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (e.g., Dörnyei, 2015) is useful because this idea is still valued and is one of the best-known references to investigate motivation. The key concepts of the L2MSS are the Ideal L2 self, the Ought-to L2 self, and the L2 Learning Experience.

Because the present study centers on pronunciation, it delves into the Ideal L2

pronunciation self and the Ought-to L2 pronunciation self. Few studies investigated relationships between motivation for pronunciation and English pronunciation levels, especially in Japan. Thus, in this study, relationships between pronunciation and motivation are discussed.

In the literature review section, the present study reviewed studies of minimal pairs for pronunciation. Most of them targeted /ɹ/ - /l/ because it is one of the most famous errors that Japanese people make (e.g., Dowling, 2020; Hattori & Iverson, 2009; Rubrecht, 2004). Example studies about other minimal pairs are /s/ - /θ/ (e.g., Kita, 2019; Ono, 2012; Suzukida & Saito, 2021) or /z/ - /dz/ (Grenon, Sheppard, & Archibald, 2019).

Suprasegmentals are also important as well as segments. Saito and Saito (2016) examined suprasegmentals such as word stress, rhythm, and intonation in the case of Japanese EFL learners, and they concluded that even the beginners of learning English should receive prosody-based instruction. However, textbooks used in Japanese high schools have few pages of learning prosody.

Saito, Dewaele, Abe, and In'nami (2018) claim that the relationship between the Ought-to L2 self and L2 learners' action is still unclear even though the association between the Ideal L2 self and learners' motivated action has been identified for 20 years. Furthermore, most studies did not investigate pronunciation by dividing it into segments and prosody. However, relationships between pronunciation and motivation

can be different, depending on segments or prosody. Thus, segments and prosody were investigated separately in the present study. This study was conducted based on research questions below:

1. Do Japanese university students distinguish sounds of minimal pairs in English?
2. Do Japanese university students speak English with appropriate prosody, such as word stress, rhythm, and intonation?
3. Is the skill of pronunciation related to the Ideal L2 self, the Ought-to L2 self, experiences of having been abroad, time spent learning English, official test scores, majors, and biological data such as age and gender?

A total of 30 university students, 21 females and 9 males, participated in the study. In order to compare individual differences about motivation to acquire English, participants from different faculties of a private university in Tokyo were asked to participate in the experiment of this study. They participated in the study under the agreement. All the participants already knew that their pronunciation would be tested. Twenty-five students who major in international affairs and five students who major in science and math participated in the experiment. Unfortunately, some data were not completed and some people made mistakes during recording. Therefore, data of 24 students for the segmental test and 26 students for the prosody test were used in the study.

A *Google form* questionnaire and a pronunciation test made by the researcher were used. As for the *Google form* questionnaire, it included bio-data questions about age and gender, the faculty that a participant belongs to, official test scores such as *TOEFL iBT* scores, experiences of having been abroad, and time spent learning English. In addition to them, ten multiple-choice questions about the Ideal L2 self and six about the Ought-to L2 self which were cited from Tekten (2020) were included. In each question, participants answered in 6-point scale. They chose an answer from *1* (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) for each question.

Furthermore, there was a pronunciation test that had examinees read aloud short English sentences and record their pronunciation with their smartphones. The pronunciation test included sentences which had /s/ - /θ/ minimal pair which has been investigated in previous studies and /z/ - /dz/ minimal pairs which has been examined by few researchers. Moreover, the pronunciation test included a section to read aloud sentences for prosody experiment.

Participants' pronunciation data of minimal pairs were analyzed for the first research question. The data were analyzed with *IELTS Band Score* (*2* to *9*) (*IELTS*, 2023). Because there are eight (*2* to *9*) band scores, results were analyzed with scores *1* (*Band 2*) to *8* (*Band 9*). The researcher and a rater who is a doctoral student and majors in English education listened to participants' speech production and measured their levels of pronunciation with the descriptors of *IELTS Band Score* after the rater had

received a training session. In the training session, we evaluated pronunciation recorded by some AI speakers, using *IELTS Band Score* (*2* to *9*). After training session was finished, we evaluated participants' segmental levels, and the inter-rater reliability was 87.5%.

Second, in order to investigate suprasegmentals, a pronunciation test for prosody was used. The researcher and the rater evaluated participants' prosody with *Prosodic feature*s descriptors from the *CEFR* (*A1* to *C2*) (Council of Europe, 2020). The inter-rater reliability was 92%.

Lastly, relationships between some characteristics of participants and their pronunciation levels were investigated. In order to do this, data from participants' responses to questions about their characteristics, 16 questions about the Ideal L2 self and the Ought-to L2 self which were cited from Tekten (2020), the pronunciation data of both segments and suprasegmentals, and scores from speech production evaluated in RQ1 and RQ2 were used for the third research question. Among the 16 questions in Tekten (2020), there were ten questions for the Ideal L2 self and six questions for the Ought-to L2 self. Then, the total scores for each of the Ideal L2 self and the Ought-to L2 self were calculated. A maximum score for the Ideal L2 self was 60 and a minimum was 10, and a maximum score for the Ought-to L2 self was 36 and a minimum was 6.

As a consequence, in RQ1, the average score was 5.33 out of 8 band scores (66.7%). The score was relatively high. It can be said that many participants were able

to distinguish /s/ - /θ/ and /z/ - /dz/ in English.

In RQ2, the average score was 3.88 out of 6 bands (64.7%). Thus, more than 60% of participants spoke English with a good pronunciation.

In RQ3, only the Ideal L2 self affected both the segmental and prosody levels. The correlation score between the Ideal L2 self and the segmental level was $r = 0.60$, the Ought-to L2 self and the segmental level was $r = -0.13$, the Ideal L2 self and the suprasegmental level was $r = 0.58$, and the Ought-to L2 self and the suprasegmental level was $r = -0.17$.

As for the effects of motivation on learning pronunciation and relationships between motivation and pronunciation levels, more detailed insights into their connections were revealed. All the participants who got higher scores of the Ideal L2 self than the average got higher scores than the average both in the segmental and suprasegmental tests. On the other hand, people who got higher scores in the segmental test or the prosody test than the half (scores of 5 or higher in the segmental test and scores of 4 or higher in the suprasegmental test) did not always have higher scores of the Ideal L2 self than the average. Thus, the extent to which students were influenced by their Ideal L2 self had a greater impact on their pronunciation levels than the extent to which they spoke English with good segments or prosody affected their motivation.

In addition, some of the other elements such as the experiences of having been abroad affected pronunciation levels. All the elements which were investigated in the

study affected participants' pronunciation levels except for the time spent learning English and age.

In conclusion, more than 60% of the students were able to speak English with the targeted segments and suprasegmentals appropriately, and only the Ideal L2 self affected their pronunciation levels while the Ought-to L2 self did not affect them.