

Bridging the Gap between the International and the National

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In the globalizing world people of different nations are now deeply concerned with preserving their cultural and ethnic identity, their languages in particular, since much of communication in the world at present is performed in English, which is mainly accounted for by economic reasons. Humanity should find modes of effective communication without risking their cultural and ethnic identity.

In the article the author dwells upon the research that is conducted in the Department of Phonetics, Institute of Foreign Languages, Far Eastern National University, in the sphere of negative transfer that takes place in the contacts of English and Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai) during the acquisition of English by Asian people.

The research involves such related problems as the prosody of English and of the Asian languages under discussion, the commonalities of Asian varieties of English alongside with their specific characteristics; the identification of potential zones of prosodic negative transfer in language contacts. Deviations in the syllable and rhythmic structure of Asian Englishes both in speech production and speech perception are investigated experimentally.

Deviations in the Production of English by Asian Speakers

The latest rapid development in world communication has left no alternative to globalization. Yet with the globalizing world people are now facing challenges in all spheres of life: economy, politics, environment, education and so on. These challenges arise mostly from the fact that the world is diversified and humanity should try hard to bring this world to harmony so that people of different nations could not risk losing their cultural or ethnic identity.

So the question arises: how to achieve this ideal state of harmony in the multicultural world?

It is no longer argued today that much of communication in the world at present is performed in English, which can be accounted for mainly by economic reasons.

Without going into detail concerning the number of L₂ speakers of English I'd like to quote Larry Smith, an outstanding linguist of present day, who said that English is an Asian language (Smith, 2004). B. Kachru, well known linguist for his ideas of World Englishes, goes further in this direction and uses the term "Asian Englishes" in his book "Asian Englishes: Beyond the Canon," and in doing so he recognizes the development of local varieties of English in different Asian countries. But whatever the variety, the language remains English, though different in its form and function (Kachru, 2005).

As Joanne Rajadurai writes in the article "Ideology and Intelligibility," quoting Trudgill, "The spread of English which has resulted in new users and owners of the language has deprived L1 speakers of the right to dictate standards and prescribe norms. This is especially pertinent when it comes to pronunciation, where there has been evidence of increasing divergences even among native varieties" (Rajadurai, 2007, p. 87). Thus we can speak of the polyphony of English today. I believe, time has come to reconsider the habitual notions of language standards, priorities in hiring language teachers (native / non-native), preferences in

teaching culture (ethnic / anglo) etc., which should be based upon the study of local varieties of English. This all will contribute greatly to successful communication and help to preserve people's national and cultural identity.

As has been mentioned above, pronunciation plays a very important role in cross-cultural communication. Hence the necessity of its research. Peculiarities in Asian English pronunciation in general, its syllabic structure in particular, have not been investigated. At the Department of Phonetics, Institute of Foreign Languages, Far Eastern National University we have been studying the diversified syllable and rhythmic structure of English speech, the phonological negative transfer in the use of English in China, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Vietnam and Thailand (Belonozhko, 2007; Kiritova, 2006; Pivovarova, 2005; Uyutova, 2004; Zavyalova, 2001).

The research involves such related problems as the prosody of English and of Asian languages, the commonalities of Asian varieties of English as well as their specific characteristics, and on this basis the identification of potential zones (areas) of prosodic negative transfer in language contacts; also, resulting from it, deviations in the syllable and rhythmic structure of English both in speech production and speech perception.

Through theoretical and instrumental analysis, we have obtained data which allow us to speak of certain typological similarities in the production and the perception of English speech by Asians.

During the experiments we analyzed the data obtained from 35-40 respondents of each of the five Asian languages, namely: Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese and Thai. The samples of Asian English speech were analyzed with the help of the computer program *Speech Analyzer (Version 1.5)*, Summer Institute of Linguistics Waxhaw, NC, 1996-2002.

The analysis of Asian English speech started with the smallest pronunciation and perception unit, the smallest prosodic unit – the syllable, a multifunctional unit which, according to Russian linguists V.B. Kasevich and L.V. Bondarko:

1. bears such prosodic phenomena as stress and tone;
2. organizes phonemes into a certain order and rhythmic structure;
3. being a minimal speech (segment) fragment, organizes speech rhythmically;
4. functions as the smallest unit of speech production and speech perception (Bondarko, 1969, 1981; Kasevich, 1981)

The structure of the syllable differs from language to language according to certain parameters:

1. closed / open character;
2. presence / absence of consonantal clusters;
3. final / non-final position of clusters;
4. special rules of joining phonemes together in a syllable.

The characteristic feature of the Germanic syllable is a wide use of consonantal clusters in word initial and word final positions and the English language has the highest concentration of the most complicated word final consonantal clusters.

Another typological character of the syllabic structure of English is that some of the sonorants can form a separate syllable. The English language is predominantly the language with a closed syllable. This causes strong deviations in the English speech production and perception by Asians since the syllable in Asian languages has certain specific character.

In Chinese, for example, the syllable is the basic pronunciation and semantic structural unit. The syllable in Chinese represents a morpheme, i.e. a meaningful unit. There are no consonantal clusters within a syllable and consonants alone cannot form a syllable. Each syllable is pronounced with an individual tone.

Other Asian languages under study also have peculiarities of their own, which hinders the acquisition of correct English pronunciation and causes negative transfer.

I would not go into detail dealing with certain peculiarities of other Asian languages but rather dwell on their commonalities.

Common to all Asian languages under study are features like:

1. the predominant use of the open syllable;
2. strictly conditioned distribution of sounds within a syllable;
3. no use of syllabic consonants;
4. no consonantal clusters within the syllable;
5. a limited number of syllables in the language.

The placement of word stress can also be a stumbling block for Asians in English language acquisition due to differences in this prosodic phenomenon.

In Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai, the prosodic structure of a polysyllabic word is characterized by a certain modification of tones in syllables. In Korean, word stress is very weak, so that you can hardly differentiate a stressed syllable from an unstressed one. In Japanese, there is a special correlation of high and low tones within the prosodic structure of the word. This correlation does not allow syllables with similar tones follow each other.

The nature of stress in Asian languages also differs. Thus in Chinese, the main parameter of stress identification is duration to be accompanied by intensity and tone. In Vietnamese, intensity is the leading parameter. Duration and tone are integral features. In Thai, the order of acoustic parameters in identifying the syllable is as follows: intensity, duration, tone. In Korean, changes in parameters of duration and intensity are responsible for stress identification. In Japanese, the leading acoustic feature in stress identification is a tone to be accompanied by duration and intensity.

This leads us to believe that the nature of stress in languages under study, English including, is complex.

We can also point out to functional differences of stress in these languages.

In Chinese, word stress performs both constitutive and distinctive functions. In Vietnamese, it is a tone that performs constitutive and distinctive functions. In Thai, word stress has only a constitutive function. The same is true of Korean word stress but it is very weak to be identified.

Compared to Asian languages, word prosody in English is characterized by a well identifiable dynamically stressed syllable, which is contrasted to weak (reduced) syllables thus forming a well organized rhythmic structure of the word both in isolation and in a phrase.

Phrasal stress of Asian languages, compared to that of English, also causes deviations in Asian English speech due to a number of differences. Thus in Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and Japanese, all syllables in a phrase are singled out, whereas in Korean only the nuclear syllable stands out from other syllables in a phrase.

The placement of stress in a phrase is also peculiar. In Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and Korean, there is a strong tendency to single out the final syllable in a phrase. In Japanese, we can hardly identify phrasal stress. Vowels in unstressed syllables can be reduced in Asian languages, but not in Korean. Thus stress-time rhythm of English speech and its accentual type allowing gradation of stresses contrast strongly against syllable-time rhythm of Asian languages, thus being the main source of deviations in their English speech.

Differences in the prosodic structure of English and Asian languages mentioned above led to numerous cases of negative transfer on different language levels: the syllable, the word, the phrase.

In the rhythmic structure of Asian English words under discussion, we can point out to the following deviations.

First, we should mention the attempts by East and South-East Asians to simplify the articulation of English words. Within this framework we are singling out the following cases:

1. Plus-segmentation, i.e. adding up some extra elements:

- an extra vowel at the beginning of a word before a consonantal cluster;
- an extra vowel within a cluster in the middle of a word;
- an extra vowel after a consonantal cluster in a word final position.

Here are a few examples from Asian languages that illustrate the above mentioned phenomena:

A Word Initial Position –

- slept [sa'lept]; fluently [fu'lu:ant(a)li]
- speaking [sa'pi:king]; frequently [fa'ri:kwantali]
- glistened [ga'lisand] (or [ga'ri:sand]); spoilt [su'poilt]
- drink [do'rink]; scratches [siku'rachi]

The Middle of the Word –

- currently ['ka:rantali]; perfectly ['perfiktali]
- frankly ['frænkali]; necklace ['nekalas]
- demonstration [demansta'reishn]

A Word-Final Position -

- friends ['frendaz]; lives ['laivaz]
- waves ['weivas] or ['weivis]
- substitute ['sabustitju:t]
- changed ['cheindid]; attacked [a'tæ kata]
- snakes ['sneikas]; snatched ['snæchid]

The English Syllable Formed by a Sonorant -

- middle ['mɪdəl]; little ['lɪtəl]
- cattle ['kædəl]
- rhythm ['rɪðmə]; whistled [ˈwɪsəld]
- kitten ['kɪtən]; possible ['pɒsəbəl]

English consonantal clusters /sp/, /st/, /sk/, /spl/, /spr/, /str/ etc. present maximum difficulties to Asian speakers and they simplify the cluster by inserting a vowel, in most cases forming an open syllable, which is a typological feature of Asian languages.

In most cases, this is a neutral (shwa) vowel but Koreans often use an alternative for the neutral, which is a mixed close vowel /ɰ/ in the system of Korean vocalism. This vowel also appears in a word final position within consonantal clusters and it is also added up to the end of the word. Thus the English word *mask* is pronounced like ['mæsuɰ], and *novelist* like ['nɒbəlisuɰ].

Adding up a vowel sound after a consonant or a consonantal cluster in a word final position:

- accent ['æ ksəntə]; old ['əʊldə]
- mine ['maɪnə]; give ['gɪvə]
- move ['mu:bə]
- attacked [ə'tæk tə]

We didn't find cases like these in Thai English.

An extra vowel in a word final position can lead to the formation of omophonetic structures, thus leading to misunderstanding:

- but – butter ['bʌtə]; old - older ['əʊldə] (in Chinese)
- speak - speaker ['spi:kə]; hard – harder ['hɑ:də] (in Korean)

Additional open syllables can appear if each consonant is followed by an extra vowel as the case is in Korean English: *strange* [sutu'ræ ndʒi].

This leads to strong modification of the English syllabic structures.

2. Another widely spread deviation in Asian English speech can be called “minus segmentation,” that is omission of certain elements, which results in the use of open syllables typical of Asian pronunciation. This phenomenon is mostly typical of Vietnamese and Thai Englishes but also occurs in other Asian English varieties, for example:

Thai English	abroad [ə'brɔ:t];
Chinese English	outside [aʊ'saɪd];
Korean English	strengthen [su'treŋθ]

Cases of consonant elision in word final position which is preconditioned by the rules of phonemic distribution in Asian Englishes:

English [s] or [z] -	
Korean English	aunts]' æ nt]; seems ['si:m]
Thai English	Its ['it]; upstairs [ap'stea]
-	
Elision of a Consonant like [v], [ts], [f], [d], [l] -	
Chinese English	best ['bes];
Thai English	cold ['ko:l];

Another case of deviation is the use of an extra pause at the juncture of syllables, which is the usual case in the Japanese variety of English:

Japanese English	respectable [ris-pek-'teibl]; treatment ['tri:t-mant]
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This phenomenon can partly be explained by the predominant use of words with 2 mores in Japanese. In many cases pauses occur after prefixes: indispensable [in'dis-'pensabal]; reorganize [ri-'o:ganaiz].

Other deviations concern the use of stress as a suprasegmental phenomenon. It results in the shift of stress: *intelligence* like [jinte'lijans]; *illegal* like ['iligal] etc.; in the use of an additional stress, in the placement of stress on every syllable, which produces the impression of a "chopped speech," in no differentiation of meaningful units by stress alone as the case is in /Erecord – reEcord/ in Chinese, for example.

Deviations in the production and the perception of accentual and rhythmic structure of words lead to deviations of the rhythm of phrases, resulting in adding up extra vowels at the juncture of words or within consonantal clusters, as the case in:

- vast territory ['westu 'teritari];
- at page ['æ ta'peidj];
- gave way ['geiva'wei];

In the Simplification of Consonantal Clusters as the Case is:

- that need [tha'ni:d]; basic minerals ['beisi'minarals];
- next week ['nest'wi:k]; that's next ['thæt'nekst];

and in stressing form words (pronouns, articles, auxiliary verbs, prepositions etc.):

with me ['with a'mi:]; such as this ['sachi'aza'this].

These deviations lead to a strong foreign accent.

A typical pronunciation feature of an Asian English phrase is the occurrence of pauses at the juncture of words. It seems next to impossible for many Asian people to produce a phrase where all the words are closely articulated as a unit. Instead, the phrase is pronounced as a number of small separate units – words.

Thus we can hardly expect an Asian speaker to convert the sequence of words *John, my, son, and, his, wife* into different sentences, the two options being:

1. *John, my son, / and his wife.* (2 people)

2. *John, / my son, / and his wife.* (3 people)

Cases like these hinder understanding considerably.

Deviations in the Perception of the Syllabic and Rhythmical Structure of English Speech by Asians

Peculiarities in speech production by a bilingual tell on the perception of English and also lead to variations caused by the rules of combining phonemes together, the syllabic structure, syllable sequences etc., of his/her native language.

Peculiarities in the syllabic structure and syllable sequences of the native language are very stable and not easily changed in a foreign language learning. This results in a number of deviations in the perception of the target language.

Again we should point out to the most typical cases of deviation in the perception of the target (i.e. English) language:

1. *Plus-segmentation*, i.e. declaration by respondents of a greater number of syllables compared to the number of really pronounced ones. This is more specific of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese varieties of English, as compared to Thai and Vietnamese varieties. For example, the English word *strange* is declared by Chinese speakers as a monosyllable one by only 10 % of respondents; the rest of respondents declared two, three, four, even five syllables in the word.

2. 41% of Korean respondents declared monosyllable English words like “*twelfths*” as containing two syllables ; whereas 67% of Japanese respondents declared this type of words as containing two syllables. Other options included three or four syllables.

Thai and Vietnamese respondents identified correctly such monosyllables as *width*, *rounds*, *mouth* etc., i.e. there was no plus segmentation.

3. *Minus-segmentation*. This phenomenon is specific of Thai and Vietnamese native speakers in their perception of English word ending in final consonants or consonantal clusters, which is alien to Thai and Vietnamese respondents. Thus words like *mistakes*, *marvelous*, *ideal*, *exercises*, *pronunciation* are declared as having from one to two, or three syllables.

We have also come across the phenomenon of minus-segmentation by Korean, Chinese, and Japanese respondents in words containing vocalic sequences, which constitute one syllable. For example, the word *association*, containing five syllables, is identified as three-syllable word by 50% of Korean respondents; the four-syllable word *colloquial* is declared by 59% of Chinese respondents as having three syllables; the five-syllable word *theoretical* is identified as having three syllables by 81% of Japanese respondents.

Respondents of all Asian languages under study declared incorrect number of syllables in words with a sonorant in a word final position. Thus the word *rhythm* is declared as having one syllable by Koreans (69%), the word *enabled* – as a two-syllable word by Chinese (35%), the words *listen*, *sudden*, *poodle* are considered monosyllabic by 45% of Japanese respondents, 44% of Vietnamese respondents, and 23% of Thai respondents.

Generally speaking variations in the perception of the syllabic structure of English words are mainly caused by the following factors:

1. the presence of consonantal clusters in the English word (*aunts*, *tenths*, *worlds*, *breadths* etc.)

2. the use of a word final consonant alien to the rules of phonemic distribution in Asian English (*shelves* – *shel/ve/s*, *husband* – *hu/s/band*)
3. the length of the word: the greater the number of syllables, the more varieties in syllable recognition are declared.

Violations in the perception of the syllabic structure of English words by Asian respondents lead to deviations in the rhythmic structure of the English phrase.

We can point out to the most typical cases:

1. The tendency to place accent on personal pronouns which contradict English rules. This tendency is rather strong especially if the pronoun is in a phrase initial position. Also, such English form words as prepositions, articles, conjunctions, particles are, in most cases, recognized by Asian respondents as stressed. This can be partly understandable and justifiable concerning the Vietnamese and Japanese varieties of English, since in these languages pronouns are not treated as form words and are often under stress in a phrase.

2. The tendency to perceive longer words within a phrase as stressed ones, since it is the prosodic parameter of quantity (length) in Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai that is responsible for the identification of a syllable as a stressed one.

3. The tendency to put an accent on the phrase final word.

Thus the analysis of the experimental data both in speech production and speech perception of English by Asians has proved that there are a lot of deviations from the target language on the pronunciation level which can hinder, sometimes dramatically, effective communication.

On the other hand, Asian speakers of English communicate in English more effectively with each other than with native speakers of English and this, we presume, can be accounted for by the similarities in the deviations from English that Asian varieties share. And this should be taken into consideration while teaching Asians the English language. Otherwise the effectiveness of communication with Asians will be close to nul since language is a powerful means of preserving national and cultural identity. If we follow it, the English language will be treated by Asians as World's treasure, as a "lingua franca" but not as a property of a certain nation.

I believe that teaching English to Asians should not be the prerogative of native speakers of English, who in most cases are not inclined to be tolerant to national varieties of English and try to impose British or American standards.

I would like to quote here B. Kachru who maintained that allowing for a variety of norms would not lead to a lack of intelligibility among varieties of English. What would emerge from this situation would be an educated variety that would be intelligible across the others (Kachru, 1992).

We assume that a special remedial course in English phonetics for Asian speakers based on the knowledge of specific Asian features will help to predict pronunciation mistakes or deviations and promote better understanding.

Thus the question remains: what is the national content of English as an International language? The answer to the question cannot be found easily. It will take time and effort of

many scholars. And there is no alternative to it if we want to bridge the gap between the international and the national.

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