Japanese English: Norm-dependency and emerging strategies

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Preliminary results of an acoustic analysis

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the English language spoken by four educated Japanese speakers from an acoustic phonetic perspective. We look closely at how they pronounce and connect segments in reading a short text. Because English has the status of an international language, it is actively used for various purposes within and across countries. English speakers are therefore not necessarily native speakers but have a different first language (L1); English is a second (L2) or foreign language (FL) for them. There are increasing numbers of studies on Japanese English (JE), particularly from attitudinal and perceptual angles (e.g. Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011; Matsuura et al., 2014), but, as McKenzie (2013: 228) notes, there is a dearth of research that documents, or systematically characterizes, the English produced by Japanese speakers.¹

This paper begins by outlining the design of the experiment and the profiles of the Japanese speakers who participated. We then describe the acoustic features of English produced by four Japanese speakers in an experimental setting (Section 3), and discuss the implications of our findings with regard to the recent direction of research that gives priority to the non-native variety over the native variety (Section 4). Agreeing with Hino’s (2016: 41) definition of Japanese English as ‘a pedagogically designed variety of English,’ we argue that ‘nativeness,’ as defined by Moyer (2013: 181), is still crucial for the development of this variety of English. This long-term process may ultimately find its way to endonormativity, a state in which a language gains relative stability. The insertion of the vowel [a] (Section 3.2.3) and devoicing of obstruents (Sections 3.1.1 and 3.2.2) may hint at this direction.

2. Recordings and participants

The data for the current study were collected from recordings which were made in a professional studio in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, in November and December in 2016. Each recording had four components. The speakers read (i) a short text (the...
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