

A phonetic study of Japanese and Korean

-with a point of view of teaching Japanese-

NAJIMA, Yoshinao

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This paper discusses how difficult the Japanese sounds are for Koreans and how the Japanese teacher should teach them effectively. We will first discuss the vowel question. Japanese has 5 vowels and 2 semi-vowels. Korean has 9 vowels and 2 semi-vowels. Korean vowels [e], [ə] and [ɛ] correspond to the Japanese [e], Korean vowels [o] and [ɔ] to the Japanese [o], and Korean vowels [u] and [ɯ] to the Japanese [u]. The teacher should explain that the difference between [e], [ə] and [ɛ] in Korean is not the same difference in Japanese. The same can be said about Korean vowels [o], [ɔ] and [u], [ɯ].

We compare stops and affricates in the two languages. Japanese has an opposition of voiced and voiceless consonants like [p] and [pʰ]. Korean has an opposition of "unaspirated", "aspirated" and "glottal" voiceless stops, [p], [pʰ] and [pʰ̚]. For Koreans, a voiced consonant in the beginning of a word is difficult to pronounce. On the other hand, a voiced consonant in the word-medial position is easy to pronounce. We have to note, however, that Korean has [p], [pʰ] and [pʰ̚]. The Japanese recognize these three phonemes as one and the same sound, i. e. as the Japanese [p]. When Koreans use [pʰ], [pʰ̚] as the Japanese [p], it sounds unnatural for the Japanese ear. A voiceless consonant in the medial position is much more difficult for the Koreans. They tend to pronounce a voiceless consonant at that position as a voiced consonant. Korean has the rule of vocalization. When a voiceless stop phoneme is placed between two voiced consonants, it is pronounced as a voiced consonant. Therefore, a Japanese voiceless consonant in the medial position is difficult for Koreans. We had better to have the Korean student pronounce a Japanese word followed by a word which has an initial voiced consonant, and remove the first word after practice. On the other hand, for ac-

-quiring the Japanese voiceless consonant in the medial position, the teacher should let the student pronounce slowly a word which contains the voiceless consonant at that position. It is imperative that the teacher explains the Japanese phonetic characteristic. The reinforcement of the consciousness of students is effective in learning the sounds.

The /z/ and /c/ are also difficult for Koreans. In Korean, there are no [z] nor [ts]. They use the closest sound [ɟ] or [dʒ] in stead of [z] and [ts]. Palatalization makes their Japanese unnatural.

Nasals are difficult too. Japanese has 5 or 6 nasals allophones of /N/ as a result of the regressive assimilation. Korean has 3 nasals as phonemes. Therefore, the Japanese must select which allophone of /N/ should be used. This choice is difficult for Koreans, because there is no hint unless they know the rules of the regressive assimilation of /N/. They have a tendency to use only one nasal sound from Korean when pronouncing the Japanese /N/. It makes their pronunciation sound unnatural to the Japanese. The teacher should explain about the Japanese /N/.

The Korean [r] and [l] also lead to some problems, when they pronounce Japanese /r/. In Korean, /l/ becomes [l] (+retroflexion) at the end of a syllable or before a consonant. Korean should not transfer this to Japanese, because in Japanese the retroflexion may sound unnatural for the Japanese ear.

The /h/ is weaker in Korean than that in Japanese. The Koreans pronounce the weak /h/ very often. Therefore, it is necessary to pay a careful attention to the omission when pronouncing the Japanese /h/.

The unique Japanese consonant /Q/ is another problem for Koreans. It has many allophones which are realized as the same consonants of the initial sound of the word that follows. Koreans have a tendency to use only [t] for /Q/.

There are many phonetic differences between Japanese and Korean. To acquire Japanese sounds, it is essential that the teacher explain the phonetic differences between the two languages. Therefore, the teacher should have a good phonetic knowledge about the foreign language that the student speaks.

(Graduate School, Himeji Dokkyo University)