

INTONATION OF TAIWANESE: A COMPARATIVE OF THE INTONATION PATTERNS IN L1, IL, AND L2

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The theme of the current study is to study intonation of Taiwanese(Tw.) by comparing the intonation patterns in native language (L1), target language (L2), and interlanguage (IL). Studies on interlanguage have dealt primarily with segments. Though there were studies which addressed to the issues of interlanguage intonation, more often than not, they didn't offer evidence for the statement, and the hypotheses were mainly based on impression. Therefore, a formal description of interlanguage intonation is necessary for further development in this field.

The basic assumption of this study is that native speakers of one language perceive and produce a second language in ways closely related to the patterns of their first language. Several studies on interlanguage prosody have suggested that prosodic structure and rules are more subject to transfer than certain other phonological phenomena, given their abstract structural nature and generality(Vogel 1991). Broselow(1988) also shows that interlanguage may provide evidence for particular analyses of the native language grammar, which may not be available from the study of the native language alone.

Several research questions will be addressed in the current study:

A. How does duration vary among native and nominative utterances?

The results shows that there is a significant difference in duration between the beginning English learners, and the native speakers of American English for all the eleven English sentences. The mean duration shows that the beginning English learners take almost twice as much time (1.70sec.), as Americans (0.97sec.) to produce English sentences.

The results also show that American speakers take significant longer time to speak all ten Taiwanese utterances. The mean duration shows that Americans take almost twice as much time (2.24sec.) as adult Taiwanese (1.14sec.) to produce Taiwanese sentences.

B. Does proficiency level influence the performance of interlanguage intonation?

Can native intonation patterns be achieved by a non-native speaker?

Wenk(1986) considers proficiency level might be a variable which related to the extent of L1 influence. His study showed that beginners do transfer rhythmic features of the L1 and advanced learners can and do succeed in overcoming mother-tongue influence.

The current study shows that proficiency level does play a role in the acquisition of English intonation by Taiwanese speakers. The duration and pitch range of the advanced learners are much closer to those of the native American English speakers than the beginners, but even advanced learners still cannot achieve native-like intonation patterns.

C. Do Taiwanese have a narrower pitch range in comparison with American English speakers?

Ross et. al.(1986) suggests that the presence of tone in a language significantly inhibits the unrestricted manipulation of three acoustical measures of prosody which are involved in producing local pitch changes in the fundamental frequency contour during affective signaling. Will the presence of tone in a language inhibit the ability of speakers to modulate intonation?

The results do show that Taiwanese have a narrower pitch range in comparison with American English speakers. Both advanced (84Hz) and beginning learners (58Hz) of English show a significant narrower F0 range than that of Americans' (112Hz), and the difference is greater between the beginning learners' group and native American English speakers.