

The Explicit and Implicit Phonological Knowledge in L2 Education

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Abstract

In the current presentation I will discuss the idea concerning implicit and explicit knowledge in L2 education in terms of phonological variation of a target language. In Korean language, there is three way distinction in stops and affricates. These distinctions are lenis /b, d, dz, g/, fortis /p', t', te', k'/ and aspirated /p^h, t^h, te^h, k^h/. In word initial position of Accentual Phrase (hereafter AP), all of them are realized as voiceless. Also in Korean, nasal sound often becomes denasalized in word initial position which for non-native speakers of Korean is sometimes realized as plosive-like sounds. The first one can be said to be explicit or conscious/overt distinction between stops and affricates in Korean language because the three way distinction is phonologically distinctive. The latter one, denasalization of nasal sounds, can be said to be implicit or unconscious/covert distinction in the language system because of its phonological in-distinctiveness. The current presentation suggests why these phonological knowledges should be considered and thought in L2 education situation.

Keywords

Denasalization, explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge, Korean, L2 education, Phonetics, Phonology

Introduction

Korean has the three-way distinction in plosives and affricates. These consonants are called lenis, aspirated and fortis. In word initial position of AP¹ all of them are realized as voiceless (lenis

[p, t, te, k], aspirated [p^h, t^h, te^h, k^h], fortis [p', t', te', k']), but in intervocalic position of AP the lenis stops and affricates are realized as voiced variants ([b, d, dz, g]). Nasal stops in Korean often become partially or completely denasalized in word initial position and they are realized as plosive-like sounds by non-native speakers of Korean² (Yoshida, 2008; Kim, 2011).

The example of plosives and affricates can be said to be explicit or overt/conscious phonological knowledge in terms of awareness of Korean native speakers towards their distinctiveness within the language system. The second one, the denasalization of nasal stops, can be said to be implicit or covert/unconscious knowledge based on the fact that Korean native speakers can never be aware of the variation³.

The present study will discuss these two kinds of variation in the context of second language education. The first one, the distinction among lenis, aspirated and fortis, is a knowledge that a second language learner should acquire in any circumstances. The latter one, the non-distinctiveness of denasalized nasal stops, is knowledge that a second language learner is not required to obtain in the context of language

slow to respond" can be analyzed as U [IP [^φ [ω [Many] ω [pupils]] IP [ω [^φ [were slow]] ω [^φ [to respond]]] (Gussenhoven & Jacobs, 2011). U = Utterance, IP = Intonational Phrase, ^φ = Phonological Phrase, ω = Phonological Word.

² In a small lecture for Korean native language teachers in Japan (Kanto Area), none of them could correctly perceive the denasalized sound of /nun/ 'snow' without any given context. Interestingly enough in a daily life we do not have any certain problem concerning perception of denasalization nasal stops because of, I think, the existence of context.

³ This basic idea concerning overt/covert/consciousness idea from Okada (2006a, 2006b) and Neustupny (1982). However, the usage of these terms is different from theirs.

¹ Accentual Phrase is a terminology used by Jun (1993, 1995, 1998) which is higher than the Prosodic Word level, and equal to the Phonological Phrase in the frame of Prosodic Phonology (Selkirk, 1986; Gussenhoven & Jacobs, 2011). The idea of Prosodic Phonology is that there are several components that constitute a Phonological Utterance above the smaller ones. For instance, the sentence "Many pupils were

learning. These knowledges or variations consist of a language system and the non-distinctiveness of denasalization, which is quite audible by non-native speakers of Korean and sometimes can affect their perception process of the target language, therefore it should be mentioned in the context of a second language learning as well as the explicit knowledge.

1 Explicit or overt/conscious and implicit or covert/unconscious knowledge

In this presentation the term of explicit and implicit knowledge is used as variations that native speakers of a certain language distinguish explicitly and implicitly in terms of phonological distinction. The explicit one is that native speakers know how a distinction emerges when changing a certain phoneme (in the case of Korean they are lenis, fortis and aspirated distinction, etc.). The implicit one is an allophonic variation that native speakers cannot catch (in the case of Korean it is denasalization of nasal sounds).

These two different kinds of knowledge should be taken into account in L2 education environment.

2 The phonological knowledge of native speakers

Based on the distinctive explicit and implicit phonological knowledge, I propose this native speakers phonological knowledge system in a certain language (in this case, Korean).

Table 1: The phonological knowledge system

	critical ⁴	non-critical
explicit	lenis/fortis/aspirated	/n/-insertion ⁵
implicit	allophones	denasalization

The left-upper column is a pair of explicit-critical knowledge of the distinctions that native speakers explicitly know. If these

⁴ I chose the word *critical* because if the rule is violated it would affect meaning critically and therefore communication difficulty emerges.

⁵ /n/-insertion is a phenomenon occurring in compounding word formation when the following part has /i/ or /j/ in the first syllable and the preceding syllable has coda (e.g. /gum/ + /i/ → gum # n # i → [gumɲi] ‘a golden-teeth’). Depending on words and dialect, /n/-insertion can be arbitrary.

properties for each sound are displaced, it would affect meanings. The right-upper column is also explicit phonological knowledge, but different in its criticalness in terms of meaning. In the same way the lower left and right columns are implicitly relevant with speakers’ phonological knowledge. Allophonic variations are definitely critical for communication and the problematic denasalization is not critical in terms of communication.

3 L2 education of phonology and language change

These explicit and implicit knowledge should be taken into account in L2 education. The rules and properties on critical side columns, needless to say, should be acquired by L2 learners regardless of any reason. The denasalization, which is on the lower right column, does not need to be acquired because of its non-criticalness and implicitness. However, this phenomenon should be mentioned in the L2 education situation even though L2 learners do not need to acquire this phenomenon because of its non-distinctiveness in Korean. If not mentioned, it can become a reason of learner’s confusion (a discrepancy between instruction and perception). The /n/-insertion on the upper right side is optional and acquiring this knowledge is not forced, but recommended.

The table 1 gives us not only the information about explicitness/implicitness and criticalness of phonetic-phonological rules, but also about important notion concerning language change. For instance, if the denasalization is more developed in Korean as a salient feature, it could be one of the three pairs; explicit & non-critical, implicit & critical and explicit & critical. Also the phenomena in three other columns can move other side within a long time span. If this kind of change happens, then language instructions also should be changed according to their status.

4 Conclusion

The present study proposed explicit and implicit phonological knowledge distinction. These distinctions should be considered in L2 education situation regardless of target languages.

Selected Reference

Kim, Y. S. (2011). *An acoustic, aerodynamic and perceptual investigation of word-initial denasalization in Korean*. PhD diss., UCL (University College London).