A Study of English Pronunciation Teaching for Korean University Students*

Park, Meekyoung** · Son, Sunah***
(Hoseo University)

Park, Meekyoung · Son, Sunah. 2015. A Study of English Pronunciation Teaching for Korean University Students. The Journal of Studies in Language 31.2, 313-336. The purpose of this study is to investigate the situation of English pronunciation teaching for Korean university students and to suggest some ideas for more effective teaching and learning of English pronunciation from the perspective of EIL (English as an International Language). This research is based on a survey of 110 Korean university students and the examination of instructional materials of 8 English teachers who have taught English conversation to the university students. The results revealed that whereas the students were aware of the importance of pronunciation education and had perceptions of English as an international language, pronunciation instruction was not implemented in the classroom properly and sufficiently. This study suggests that teachers need to recognize the functional change of English as an international language and redefine the goal and the method of pronunciation teaching. (Hoseo University)

Key words: pronunciation teaching, English as an International Language(EIL), varieties, Lingua Franca, intelligible(comprehensible) pronunciation

1. Introduction

Pronunciation is an essential part of what we communicate about ourselves (Beebe, 1978), and it is important in achieving communicative competence (Pennington & Richards, 1986). As the goal of pronunciation teaching is communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1997;

* This study adopts some parts and data from the first author’s unpublished doctoral dissertation. We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments and helpful criticisms. All the remaining errors are ours.
** First author
*** Corresponding author
Gatbonton *et al.*, 2005), pronunciation must be taught in second language classes through diverse activities (Scarcella & Oxford, 1994).

There have been arguments against the explicit teaching of pronunciation to adult L2 learners. While some studies have supported the critical period hypothesis which claims that it is impossible for adults to achieve successful acquisition of L2 phonology in a foreign language (Scovel, 1969; Mack, 1986; Brown, 1994), some research has revealed a high possibility that pronunciation can be taught and it is possible for the adult L2 learners to obtain good pronunciation (Neufeld, 1978; Bongaerts *et al.*, 1997; Kahng, 2006; Celce-Murcia *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary that teachers set a proper goal in teaching pronunciation to adult learners effectively.

The goals and needs of adult learners learning English pronunciation can vary according to a variety of factors. In other words, their goals and needs depend on in which settings, and for what purposes the learners use English. English has become an international language among the people for whom English is chosen as a means of communication today. A large number of nonnative speakers of English use English for their communication with other nonnative speakers of English from different countries. In the situation where English now is utilized by all of its users—both native and nonnative speakers—for their international communication, the goal of teaching English as an International Language (EIL), as McKay (2002) argues, is to ensure mutual intelligibility among the speakers of English and not to drive learners to approximate native speaker’s pronunciation.

For Korean L2 learners learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), most of their learning occurs in the classroom. For this reason, Korean learners tend to rely on their teachers excessively and thus allow the teachers to play a pivotal role in learning English. As the teacher is the major source who guides and helps the learners to achieve right English pronunciation in the EFL classroom, it is necessary that English teachers be equipped with a good knowledge of English phonology and teaching methods in order to teach accurate pronunciations to their adult students. In addition, it is also important that teachers consider the various factors within the learners that affect pronunciation learning.