

The Study on the English Intonation Acquisition of Non-English Majors

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Abstract: In recent years, English intonation acquisition has become a hot topic. This paper attempts to study the intonation acquisition of the Non-English majors. Study shows that Non-English majors have no awareness of intonation when they speaking English and they don't know how to use it correctly.

Keywords: Intonation acquisition; Tonality; Tonicity; Tone

1. Introduction

Intonation plays a very important role in communication. Cruttenden(1986) says that “Intonation involves the occurrence of recurring pitch patterns, each of which is used with a set of relatively consistent meanings, either on single words or on groups of words of varying length. Grammatical constituents of any level up to at least the sentence may be treated as separate intonation-groups having their own meaningful tune (and indeed some features of intonation may even link such groups together into ‘paratones’, a word meant to indicate an analogy with paragraphs in the written language)”(Cruttenden, 1986).

While Halliday (1967) put forward a concept of the triple T system of English intonation from the perspective of information expression. This concept combines grammar, intonation and information into one general intonation system, and these aspects develop into Halliday's 3T system, namely tonality, tonicity and tone(Halliday, 1967). Combined the syntax, grammar and information, this system gives a comprehensive description of the intonation which become the foundation of the later researches.

For more than one hundred years, the study of intonation by foreign researchers can be summarized into four categories: configurational mode, pitch phoneme mode, autosegmental metrical (AM) mode and pragmatic use (Chomsky, 1968; Ladd, 2008; Barnes et al., 2021; Gras&Wendy, 2021).

While the domestic scholars' research on English intonation mainly includes two categories, that is, the explanation research and the empirical research (Chen, 2006;Cheng, 2012;Ran Bi, 2017;Juanjuan Xiao&Guowen Huang, 2019)

However, the process of intonation acquisition is still rarely studied in depth until now. Linguists put more focus on the intonation acquisition of the English major, which ignores the Non-English major. So, this paper attempts to study the intonation acquisition of the Non-English majors in more details.

2. Method

The stimuli for our paper are from the recordings of eight Non-English major students. The participants were required to read a proper passage in English. Then, according to the acoustic analysis software Praat, data analysis software Excel as research tools, TOBI as the annotation basis, and other scholars' findings, we have following results.

3. Results and discussion

According to the stimuli of eight Non-English major, they have no awareness of intonation when they speaking English. Qi (2020) made a research which shows that 92% of students think that they have no awareness of intonation in spoken English; 97% of students have no awareness of intonation training and have never trained themselves. Research shows that English intonation is positively correlated with oral output ability. So, the first step is to arouse the Non-English major's awareness of English intonation through the original and vivid communication materials.

In teaching, Chinese English teachers found that learners do have many intonation problems. Chen(2005) used experimental phonetics to study the English intonation patterns in Chinese English learners' reading. Her research found that learners have a certain amount of mother tongue transfer in English output, the number of pauses greatly exceeds the number of pauses of native speakers, and there are more errors in the position of the pauses. Learners often give stress to functional words such as prepositions, personal pronouns, conjunctions, etc. (Hua Chen, 2006). They don't give enough stress to the negative words of the new information carrier. Longitudinal research results show that the stress problem persists significantly. In the four years of university study, not only has it not improved, but has shown a certain upward trend; the rhythm pattern generated by the learner's stress pattern has not changed significantly in the four years, which reflects The rhythm characteristics of a very typical syllable timed language. Therefore, the

cultivation of intonation awareness at the initial stage of university study can indicate the direction of effort for learners, reduce wasteful work, and lay a solid foundation for effectively improving oral English.

As for the details, There are five mainly problems in intonation acquisition: (1) the intonation is straight and there is no ups and downs. It sounds dull and boring, not graceful, and cannot properly express thoughts and emotions. (2) The intonation mode used is relatively simple and the application is unnatural. There are three commonly used tones in English. Students generally use falling tones too much. Using rising tones is a bit blunt and unnatural, and they do not like or do not use falling tones. For example, addressing words, quotations, appositions, parentheses, etc. are often only read aloud in falling tones. (3) Use machinery to adjust the model to achieve one size fits all. For example, special interrogative sentences are always read in a falling tone, and general interrogative sentences are read in a rising tone. (4) Not good at dealing with the intonation of long or complex sentences. Intonation is generally not a problem when reading short sentences or simple sentences. Long sentences and complex sentences often do not deal with the ups and downs of intonation. You don't know when and where to rise or fall, or the intonation rises and falls too high or too low, which sounds uncomfortable. (5) The tuning core is not prominent. The tonal nucleus is the most prominent stress in a sentence, and the intonation change of the intonation group generally falls on the tonal nucleus. However, many students are often not sure about the ups and downs and the severity of the tune, especially when the tune tail is relatively long and the rising tone should be used to read aloud, the result cannot highlight the focus of the information(Hu Chen, 2009).

4. Conclusion

So, we need to Learning pronunciation and intonation focuses on practice. It is far from enough to only grasp the theoretical knowledge of English pronunciation and intonation. It is necessary to listen more, feel more, imitate more, practice more, and practice more methods. For example, when learning English phonemes, it is a good way to practice English tongue twisters; when practicing rhythm, it may be more effective to use music beats. It is also advisable to improve the sense of rhythm by practicing English songs; when learning intonation, consciously use wavy Intonation read aloud. If you persist for a long time, you will naturally develop the habit of English pronunciation, and your pronunciation and intonation will be more authentic.

What's more, learn the pronunciation intonation in the analysis and imitation, consolidate and improve in the real situational conversation, and avoid the blindness of imitation. Change the concept of pronunciation and intonation learning, and avoid excessive isolated and mechanical training. Pay attention to the expression of the communicative function of voice and intonation, pay attention to the analysis of the textual information structure, strengthen the learning of pragmatic knowledge, and avoid "seeing only the trees, not the forest". For example, it is not only necessary to learn word stress well, but more importantly, it is necessary to learn to grasp sentence stress or the stress in the text, because stress is not only affected by expressions, but also by rhythm and rhythm; intonation has a certain flexibility. The same sentence pattern or the same sentence can be spoken in different tones under different circumstances to express different meanings and feelings, so learn to express different thoughts and feelings in a rich variety of intonation patterns. Step by step, pay attention to the natural transition from easy to difficult, simple to complex, from single sentence to complex text, from slow to fast, and from accurate to fluent.

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