

Travaux du 19ème CIL | 19th ICL papers

Congrès International des Linguistes, Genève 20-27 Juillet 2013
International Congress of Linguists, Geneva 20-27 July 2013



Victoria ZAVYALOVA

Far Eastern Federal University, Russia
zavyal@mail.ru

Interphonology Research: Stress in Asian Varieties of English

poster presentation in workshop: 132 Word stress: dialectal variation and perception (Richard WIESE, Volker DELLWO & Agnes KOLMER)

Published and distributed by: Département de Linguistique de l'Université de Genève, Rue de Candolle 2, CH-1205 Genève, Switzerland
Editor: Département de Linguistique de l'Université de Genève, Switzerland
ISBN:978-2-8399-1580-9

Interphonology Research: Stress in Asian Varieties of English*

Viktoriya Zavyalova

*This work was supported by the Far Eastern Federal University,
project № 14-08-05-14_и

Key words: Asian Englishes, phonetic variation, word stress, phonological comparative analysis

1. Introduction

Back in 1997 Braj Kachru proclaimed English an Asian language (Kachru 1998), and today English is continuing to grow as Asia's de facto lingua franca (Adamson 2004, Stanlaw 2004, Asian Englishes 2007, Bolton 2003, Bondarenko, Zavyalova 2008, Kachru 2006, Honna 2008, Jenkins 2009, Kirkpatrick 2010). The diversity of Asian Englishes implies cultural, linguistic, and, thus, phonological polyphony determined by the speakers' different mother tongues. The blending of genetically and typologically different English and Asian languages (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.) results in the phonetic/phonological transfer. Phonological variation in the Expanding circle varieties has been either treated as an ethnic sound coloring by the WE advocates or recognized as deviation from the standard English sound model, which might hinder communication. Moreover, English speakers' sound production and perception bases are no longer viewed as isomorphic, since productive listening comprehension in the multicultural communication context implies a more flexible and sophisticated perception base that contains multiple phonological samples of World Englishes. The blending of genetically and typologically different English and Asian languages (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.) results in the phonetic/phonological transfer, which affects prosodic organization of speech by Asian speakers.

2. Objective

A thorough comparative study of the regional Asia Pacific English varieties has been targeted at providing an optimization tool for the educational exposure of future interpreters to the diversity of Asian English accents, developing accent elimination programs for international students from East Asia, and promoting the interphonology research.

3. Data

Research is based on the data obtained through the ongoing project of Far Eastern Federal University on collecting English corpora in the Far East of Russia and in the

neighboring Asian countries – “Building *Russian-Asian Corpus of English (RACE¹)*”. The major record fields of the RACE database are designed to include samples of the region’s most representative non-native English varieties, namely: Russian English, China English, Japanese English, and Korean English. American and British English fields contain reference point samples that can be used to compare and discuss phonetic variations. All speech samples are subdivided into spontaneous (or quasi-spontaneous) speech and samples of reading written English texts aloud. The reading section texts were selected with regard to potential complexity for Asian speakers (in terms of consonant clusters realization, lexical stress placement, phrasal accentuation, choice of rhythmic and melodic patterns, macrosegmentation strategies, etc). This criterion for text selection ensures the most problematic zones of the English phonetic system at both segmental and suprasegmental levels for non-native speakers are revealed.

4. Method

Auditory analysis of the recorded samples of Asian Englishes by two groups of listeners – General American speakers and Russian teachers of English phonetics – allowed to determine the scope of phonetic variation (related to the degree of English language proficiency of the subjects). Of the three groups representing basilect, mesolect, and acrolect, mesolect speakers were chosen as the basis for further study. Comparative method has been employed in the interphonology research, in which the prosodic features of Asian Englishes have been compared with those of American English in order to derive a set of core properties common to all varieties of Asian English, as well as to discover features that are particular to individual varieties. The comparative study of stress in speech samples included differentiation of all acoustic features such as duration, frequency, intensity and spectrum. All analyses were done with the use of Praat and Speech Analyzer scripts.

5. Results

The main findings of the research include the following:

- 1) stressed syllables in Asian Englishes are, usually, as long as those in American English, while unstressed syllables are not as short (the phenomenon is termed “lack of deprominencing”);
- 2) unstressed syllables are often given stress in Asian Englishes;
- 3) the prominence is achieved by a combination of longer duration, stronger intensity and higher degree of variation in frequency in Asian Englishes than in American English;
- 4) as a result of features 1-3, Asian Englishes are generally characterized by low differentiation between stressed and unstressed syllables;
- 5) the rhythmic structure of an English polysyllabic words is regularly transformed;

¹ The RACE project has been supported by the Russian Ministry of Education and FEFU Research Foundation

6) in China English prominence seems to be very similar to L1 tone modifications (termed “reincarnation” of tones by Braj Kachru), which is explained by the lack of word stress in Chinese;

7) Korean English demonstrates low level of intensity and duration contrast in stressed and unstressed syllables (note, that the typology of Korean stress is still not revealed), etc.

Below is an example of visualized comparative acoustic analysis of stress distribution within a word employed in the study.

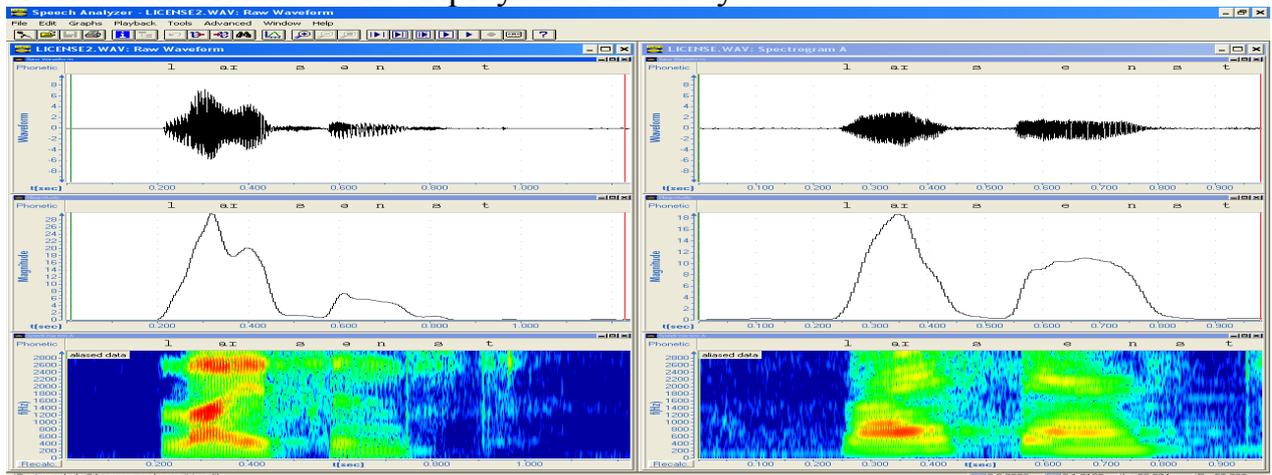


Figure 1. Waveform, intensity graph, and spectrogram of the word “*licensed*” pronounced by the speaker of American English (left) and the speaker of Korean English (right)

Figure 1 shows a very common type of word stress pattern modification, which is called redundant (or extra) stress in two-syllable English words.

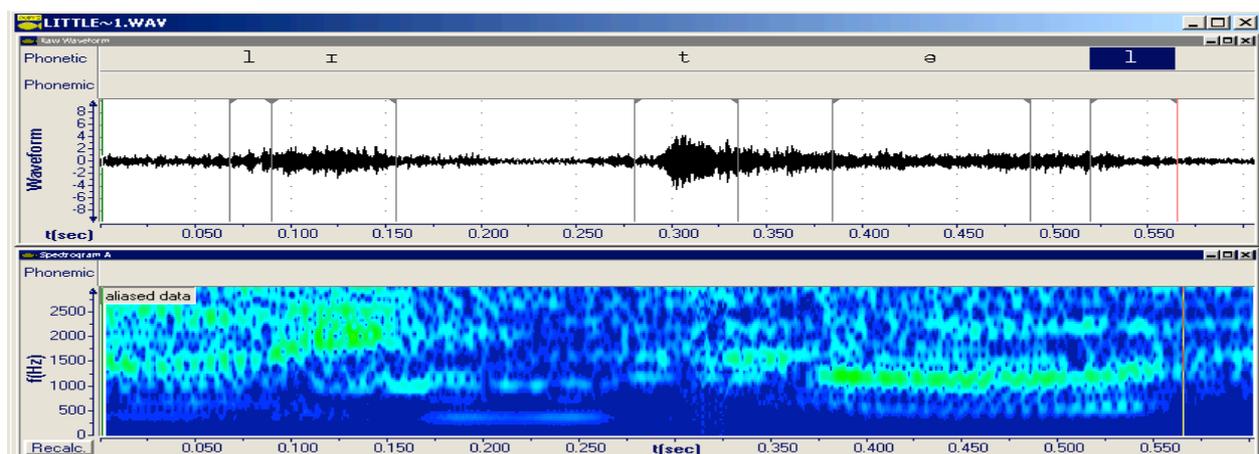


Figure 2. Waveform and spectrogram of the word “*little*” pronounced by the speaker of Chinese English

Figure 2 demonstrates a regular type of stress pattern modification at word-level in Asian Englishes, which is caused by inserting vowel sounds to split consonant clusters and, thus, lengthening and intensifying the (newly) formed syllable.

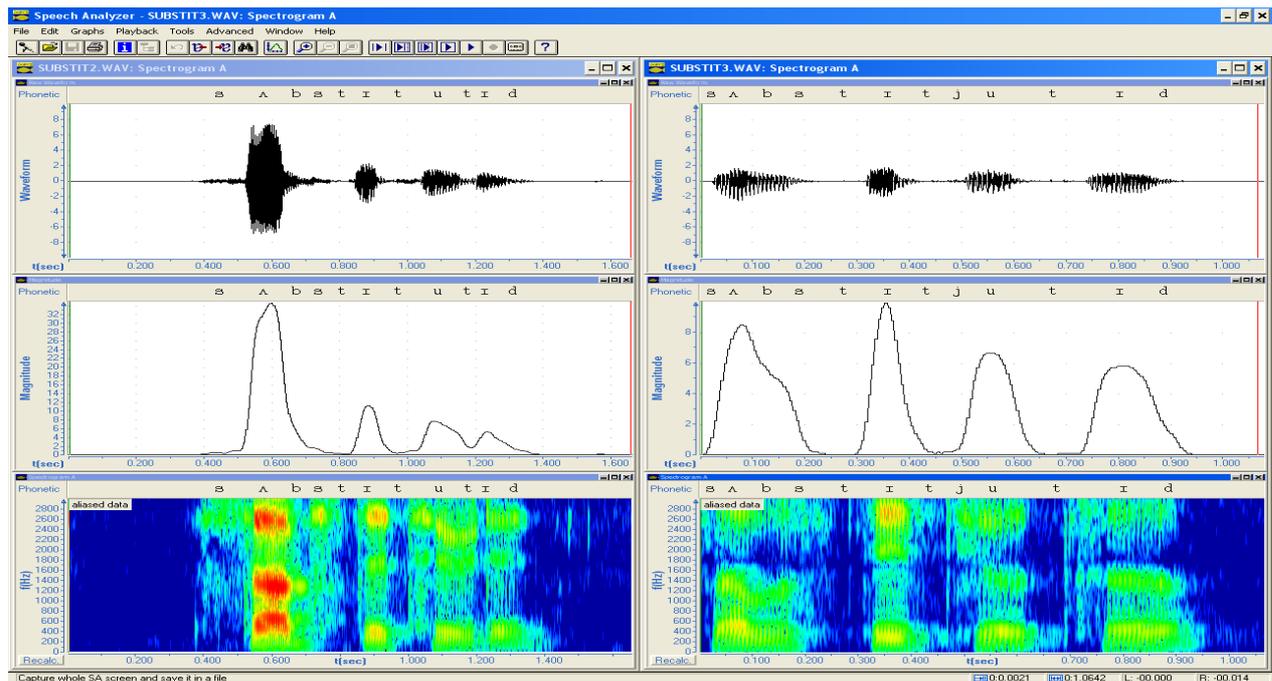


Figure 3. Waveform, intensity graph, and spectrogram of the word “*substituted*” pronounced by the speaker of American English (left) and the speaker of Korean English (right)

Figure 3 is an example of the tendency in Asian speakers to pronounce each syllable in a polysyllabic English word isochronically, with salient lengthening of the last syllable and equal intensity distribution among all syllables.

6. Discussion

Modifications of stress distribution patterns at word level in Asian Englishes are often caused by the differences in phonotactic rules in the languages in contact, which leads to the interference phenomenon known as resegmentation. Producing English consonant clusters, or consonants that frequently occur in a final position from which Asian languages consonants are excluded, Asian speakers of English try to ease their pronunciation applying to one of the following strategies:

- 1) Phonemic quantity change, or full deletion of consonants;
- 2) Vowel insertion;
- 3) Consonant cluster reduction;
- 4) Pausing at the syllable boundaries in polysyllabic words;

The phenomenon of resegmentation results in syllable structure change, and consequently leads to stress and rhythmic structure change of the word. Modification of the syllabic and rhythmic structures in many instances leads to the stress shift or to the appearance of extra prominence. The distribution of primary and secondary stress in English polysyllabic words presents a real pronunciation difficulty for Asian speakers of English, thus, they tend to arrange English polysyllabic words with redundant stresses, or give prominence to every syllable in a word. The findings of the research also demonstrate the predominant acoustic features employed by the

Russian speakers of English (Far Easterners), with greater prominence of stressed syllables being achieved by longer duration, which is explained by the fact that the Russian phonetic system is characterized by the quantitative stress type.

7. Conclusion

It can be summarized that Asian speakers of English do not demonstrate native-like patterns of achieving prominence because they transfer their L1 patterns of rhythmic organization of a word to their L2. Asian varieties of English are characterized by their unique system of phonetic organization. This specificity is determined by genetic and typological differences between English, on the one hand, and Asian languages under study, on the other hand. The main typological characteristics of Asian languages – Chinese being syllabic, tonal, syllable-timed, Korean – non-syllabic with features of syllabism, syllable-timed with insignificance of individual word stress, Japanese – non-syllabic with features of syllabism, pitch-accented, mora-timed (i.e. longer syllable duration makes a phonological difference) come to interfere with the English phonological features (the language being phonemic, and stress-timed). As a consequence, the specificity of word stress in Asian Englishes can be treated as their mesolectal interphonology innate trait.

References:

- Adamson, B. (2004) *China's English: A History of English in Chinese Education*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press
- Asian Englishes. (2007) Ed. by Kingsley Bolton; Braj B Kachru. Vol. 1-5. London : Routledge
- Bolton, K. (2003) *Chinese Englishes: A Sociolinguistic History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Bondarenko, L., Zavyalova, V. (2008) English as Asian Lingua Franca: a Russian Perspective. The 14th Conference of the International Association for World Englishes held in Hong Kong: World Englishes and World's languages: Convergence, Enrichment, or Death? City University of Hong Kong; Department of Chinese, Translation & Linguistics, 76-77
- Dziubalska-Kolaczyk, K., Przedlacka, J. (eds). (2005, 2008) *English Pronunciation Models: A Changing Scene*. Second Edition. Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien
- Graddol, D. (2006) *English Next. Why Global English May Mean the End of 'English as a Foreign Language'*. The British Council.
- Honna, N. (2008) *English as a multicultural language in Asian contexts: Issues and Ideas*. Tokyo: Kurosio Publishers

- Jenkins, J. (2009) English as a lingua franca: interpretations and attitudes. *World Englishes*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 200–207
- Kachru, B. (1998) English an Asian Language. *Links and Letters*, 5, 89-108
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2010) *Asian Englishes Today. English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN. A Multilingual Model*. Hongkong: Hongkong University Press
- Lee, B., Guion, S. and Harada, T. (2006) Acoustic Analysis of the Production of Unstressed English Vowels by Early and Late Korean and Japanese Bilinguals. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, Vol. 28, 487-513
- Proshina, Z. (2008) *The ABC and the Controversies of World Englishes*. Khabarovsk
- Stanlaw, J. (2004) *Japanese English: Language and Culture Contact*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press
- Zavyalova, V.L. (2010) Developing Phonetic Competence among ELF speakers in the Russian Far East and the Asia-Pacific Region. *Conference Booklet of the Third International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca, Vienna*, 76
- Zhang, Y., Nissen, S.L. and Francis, A.L. (2008) Acoustic Characteristics of English Lexical Stress produced by Native Mandarin Speakers. *Journal of the Acoustic Society of America*, Vol. 123, no. 6, 4498-4513