

How Non-Native Speakers Make Phonetic Adjustments to Partners in Dialogue

Jiwon Hwang, Susan E. Brennan, & Marie K. Huffman
Stony Brook University

Ambiguities arise when non-native speakers fail to make phonetic contrasts that are absent in their native language. Korean speakers lack the voicing contrast b/p (“*mob*” vs. “*mop*”) and the vowel contrast ae/E (“*pat*” vs. “*pet*”), leading to ambiguous pronunciation of English words. In two referential communication experiments, Korean speakers of English spontaneously pronounced target words (e.g., “*mob*”). A confederate partner either primed the target words (e.g., asking “What is below “*hob*?”) or not, or needed to be able to pragmatically distinguish two contrasting words (“*mob*” adjacent to “*mop*” in the array), or not. Korean speakers produced more English-like phonetic targets in both the priming and pragmatic conditions (vowel duration was used to signal both contrasts). Moreover, Korean speakers were primed to make the disambiguating contrast when interacting with an English speaker but not with another Korean speaker of English. Implications for audience design and adaptation in dialogue are discussed.