

# The Knowledge of English Pronunciation Using *Katakana*

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**Abstract** Three kinds of tests were implemented with 35 college students. These tests were the dictation test, the test involving hearing to English pronunciation and writing in *katakana* and the test involving seeing English pronunciation written in *katakana* and writing it in English. It was found from the results that knowledge of pronounce variation is necessary in order for dictation to be understood. It was also found that knowledge of the variation in pronunciation between English and *katakana* affects grading of dictation even more than vocabulary.

## Introduction

Koike (1985) reported that 45 percent of learners of EFL hope to learn oral communication. Onodera (1980) conducted a survey as to what is the most important of four skills for the learners. The result clearly shows that applicants learning listening skills improve at a rate of 2.2 percent each year. The rate of applicant improvement is overwhelmingly higher in comparison with those of speaking skills (-1.6%), writing skills (0.6%) and reading skills (-1.0%). Many learners start with the desire to become able to speak English and after all they realize that it is impossible to communicate with others without enough listening skills. This is to say that it is essential to learn listening skills to communicate with others. But contrary to their wishes, Onodera (1980) also points out that their listening skills are inferior. Based on the comparative survey with 1100 Japanese high school third grade students and exchange students from many countries in Michigan University, the English communication ability of Japanese high school students is lower in comparison to that of exchange students, especially their listening skills. Each skill is also learned separately (ARUKU, 1982). Learning of listening skill is difficult for learners and a creates problem in accuracy as well. Tanabe (1990) pointed out that the training of listening skill is slighted more than that of reading skill and writing skill in the entrance examination preparation, so it become a defect in English study at school.

According to the study of Takefuta (1981), it is clear that the listening skill of Japanese English learners is interfered with by the system of the mother tongue. Japanese are also poor at pronunciation and can not do overall listening (Takefuta, 1978). The length of the sentence, noise of the tape, imagination of the context and way of thinking (Takefuta, 1982) that are different between Japanese and English are probably influenced by the dictation that is used in this study.

The purpose for study which is suitable for learners who are shown the best way to learn, they understand how they should study clearly and become less and less resistant, Kubo (1999) indicated. Moreover, these ways to study are expected to increase the will and the performance in study.

In this study, the hypothesis is what English pronunciation can not be caught correctly as learners appraise subjectively is the reason why dictation ability is not developed. It is conceivable that the cause of this is insufficient knowledge of variant pronunciations caused by liaison or any sound itself not heard. to investigate the hypothesis three kinds of tests were conducted, which require writing English pronunciation in *katakana* as participants listen and to see if images of pronunciation are gotten. Besides, analyzing which knowledge of vocabulary or pronunciation is exertive to performance of dictation.

## Method

### Participants

The participants in this tests are 35 (9 men and 26 women) college students in the second grade. They are taking an education course and took the TOEIC test before. The average point of TOEIC is 414 points in total and 239 points in the listening section.

### Material used

Thirty phrases each two phrases making one set were chosen from the text (Shizuka, 1997) to make question papers. To confirm whether all of the participants can understand sentences, someone (the score of TOEIC is 215 points in total and 125 points of listening) who was not a participant, was asked to translate 60 sentences into Japanese. Only 42 sentences that he could translate at that time were used for tests. These sentences were divided among the group in two as form *A* and form *B*. In both of them are included the same kinds of 21 phrases each. The 21 kinds of phrases are given below. Form *A* was used for test 1 and test 2, and form *B* was used for test 3.

#### 21 kinds of phrases

are you going to be	give me a	what about
been	how about	what do you
do you know	I can't	what do you do
do you mind if I	I don't know	where did you
end of	I wanted to	you are
forget it	out of	you like it
get out	sure is	you should

Form *B* is different from form *A* in that all English sentences are written in *katakana*. The source (Shizuka, 1997) was quoted to make *katakana* sentences. For participants to easily understand the situation properly, the 42 English phrases were set in conversation forms. All conversations except English phrases that were selected were shown with the Japanese words.

### Procedure

The time which someone who were not participants spent on answering questions before was used as the answering time. Three kinds of tests were carried out during the lesson, and participants were told that these tests are concerned with the record. The form of these tests is as follows.

#### Test 1: Dictation test as usual

The test of form *A* was used again and answering time was also the same as test 2.

#### Test 2: Listening to English pronunciation and writing it in *katakana*

Listening to the tape of form *A*, participants wrote English pronunciation in *katakana* as they heard it. One week before the test, the way to write in *katakana* was practiced by listening to the music of English songs. When writing in *katakana*, the strong accent is set up to be written in big characters and the weak accent is in small characters. The way to write in *katakana* was practiced once just before the test to make sure everyone was comfortable with it. Sentences were repeated five times each, and the time for answering each question was 35 seconds, 13 minutes in total.

Test 3: Seeing English pronunciation written in *katakana* and writing it in English.

Seeing the test of form *B* in which English pronunciation is written in *katakana*, participants wrote it in English. The answering time was 40 seconds for each question, 14 minutes in total. Because seeing *katakana* and rewriting in English was an unusual thing for the participants, the time was lengthened by 5 seconds per question.

Forty seconds were measured with the stopwatch and participants informed. Until 40 second had passed, people who ended early were kept waiting because to answer one question in 40 seconds is the condition for all the members to do together.

### The viewpoint of the analysis

- (1) The variety of the performance by the difference of the phrase that were used in the test.
- (2) Whether the imagining of pronounce variation is in agreement with the

pronunciation that is heard.

(3) Which knowledge of vocabulary or pronunciation is exertive on dictation.

### Result

1. About the variety of the performance by the difference of the phrase that were used in the test

The three tests were graded with the phrase unit and sentence unit and shown in rates. Table 1 summarizes the results of the test. A significant difference was found in the phrase unit and sentence unit within each test. A difference of 12 percent (corresponding to question three) to 18 percent (corresponding to question four) was observed in the average of total point.

Table 1 Correct answer rate of the phrase and sentence in each test (N=35)

	<u>Sound to English</u>		<u>Sound to Katakana</u>		<u>Katakana to English</u>	
	Phrase	Sentence	Phrase	Sentence	Phrase	Sentence
you should	89	43	83	46	94	0
how about	77	46	46	43	86	83
what about	43	40	46	46	69	63
you like it	83	77	71	69	80	34
give me a	49	6	46	14	67	46
what do you do	94	94	83	80	40	23
what do you	57	14	34	14	60	60
where did you	57	57	46	40	29	0
I can't	57	9	63	34	20	20
do you know	29	23	57	49	86	0
you are	31	29	80	51	3	0
get out	17	0	31	0	31	9
sure is	9	0	31	31	6	6
been	9	0	6	0	31	14
I don't know	0	0	0	0	77	74
are you going to be	17	9	26	20	11	6
I wanted to	14	3	11	3	3	0
do you mind if I	3	0	14	3	11	6
forget it	6	0	14	6	20	11
end of	11	9	11	11	3	3
out of	9	9	11	6	9	3
Average	36	22	39	27	40	22
SD	3.19	2.52	3.44	3.24	2.72	2.50

About the results of the test in which English pronunciation was written in katakana as participants heard it: This is the test which checked whether English pronunciation was heard correctly. Regarding "you should", the phrase was in the beginning of a sentence and easy to catch, however, "done it" in the second half of sentence was hardly pronounced, especially "it". "Forget it" was also similar for the same reasons. On account of a long sentence, more than eight words, the points of "are you going to be," "do you mind if I," "I don't know" and "been" were affected. Some participants wrote "I don't know" as "I'm watching" in *katakana* by mistake.

About the results of the dictation: Because the same sentences were used with the test above, the characteristics of the results are similar to each other. As for "what do you do," the sentence and phrase with the same number of words and where each word was easy, the points were high. Although easy to catch in the beginning of the sentence, yet the phrases of "I can't," "give me a" and "what do you" in the second half of sentence were remarkably difficult to catch. Therefore the difference was observed in the correct answer rate of the phrase and sentence. Some participants wrote "I don't know" as "I'm watching" by mistake, which is the same as mentioned above. Misunderstood listening was reflected in both kinds of tests.

About the result of the test involving seeing English pronunciation written in katakana and writing it in English: This is the test which checked whether English pronunciation was imaged. Regarding "you should," the phrase was easy to catch so a high point was gotten. However as these sentences were long with seven words and difficult to read, there was a difference in the points of phrases and sentences. Because "what do you do," "do you mind if I," "end of," "do you know" and "I wanted to" were many letters long, there was an influence on the point of sentence unit as well. On the other hand, "I don't know," "what do you do" and "how about," no difference occurred in the correct answer rate, because the sentences and phrases were the same number of words and short. Due to short sentences, the correct answer rate of "give me a" and "what do you" were high.

In the following analysis, only the correct answer rate of the phrase was used.

## 2. About the imaging of pronunciation

Using the results of each of the three kinds of tests, each correlation was plotted. Correlation between the dictation test and the test of seeing English pronunciation in katakana and then writing it in English was  $r=.70$  ( $p<.001$ ). A strong correlation was found between them. The correlation between the dictation test and the test of hearing pronunciation and writing it in *katakana* was  $r=.81$  ( $p<.001$ ). There was also a strong correlation found between them. The correlation between the test of hearing pronunciation and writing it in katakana and the test of

seeing English pronunciation in *katakana* and writing it in English was  $r = .66 (p < .001)$ . In comparison with the two correlations given above, the third correlation was rather weak. Thus, actual pronunciation was different from imaging of individual pronunciation. Each individual point of correlation appears in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

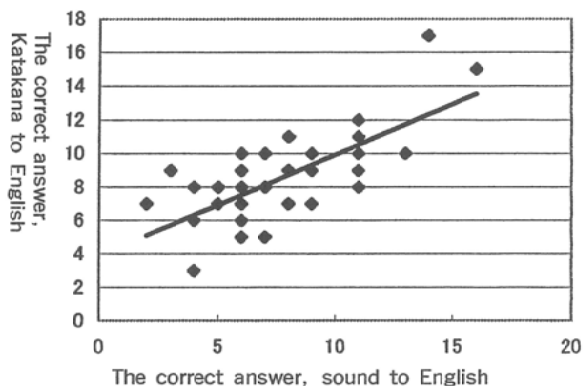


Figure 1 Relation between the correct answer of test 3 and test 1

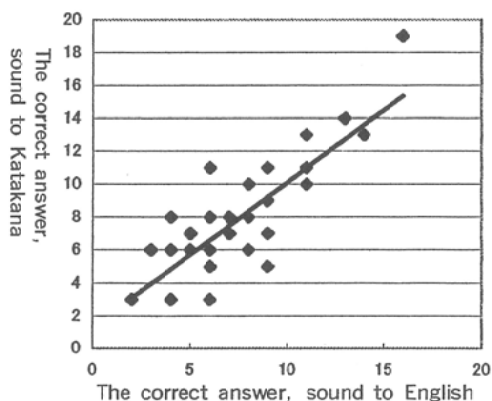


Figure 2 Relation between the correct answer of test 2 and test 1

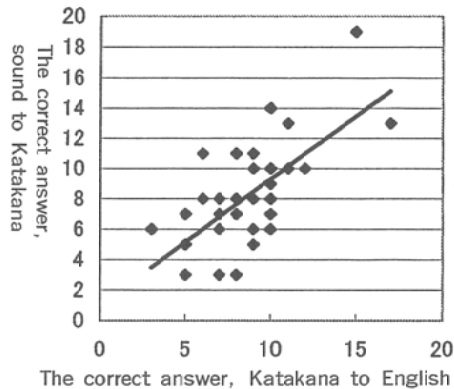


Figure 3 Relation between the correct answer of test 2 and test 3

### 3. Which, vocabulary or pronunciation, is exertive on dictation

It was analyzed whether vocabulary or a variation in pronunciation had an influences on dictation. The correct answer rate of test 3 was used as the variation in pronunciation. On account of the same participants with this study, the result of Sasagawa's study (1999) was used regarding vocabulary. The correct answer rate of test 2 was used as dictation of the dependent variable ('effect'). The correct answer rate of test 1 was used as a covariance of the listening skill. Each of the three correlations and partial correlations were analyzed. The following results were obtained. The correlation between the variation of pronunciation and dictation was  $r = .70 (p < .001)$  and the partial correlation was  $r = .35 (p < .001)$ . The correlation between the knowledge of vocabulary and dictation was  $r = .53 (p < .001)$ , and the partial correlation was  $r = .13 (p < .05)$ . It was found from the results that the correlation and partial correlation between the dictation and knowledge of variation in pronunciation are both almost twice as strong as those between the dictation and knowledge of vocabulary. This obviously shows that knowledge of the variation in pronunciation exerted a strong influence on dictation rather than knowledge of vocabulary.

### Discussion

The points of all three kinds of tests were fairly low in spite of sentences being selected according to easy of understanding before tests. Portions of weak pronounced comparatively, for instance, "it" and "if I" were mistaken by many participants. Due to average points of phrases being higher than that of sentences, English was caught separately in listening which usually is done with guessing the context of sentence and structure. Even spoken English was too fast for participants to catch in tests, pronunciation was not to be grasped as a series of words. This thought

coincides with the study of Takefuta (1982) listening to individual words and small units was too heavily relied upon in listening to pronunciation.

In the test of seeing English pronunciation written in *katakana* and writing it in English, participants were not used to English pronunciation written in *katakana*, so it influenced long sentences so that grades were bad. To the contrary, high points were gotten in short sentences because they could see the question without missing hearing the spoken English such as on a dictation test. As listening is more difficult than reading, recognition of pronunciation signals is more difficult than that of letter signals, according to Shizuka (1997). From his theory, it is effective for participants to be shown English pronunciation by *katakana*. Before tests, it might have been better had participants taken a test that involved translating English sentences into Japanese, and then using only those sentences that they could translate.

A strong correlation was found between the dictation test and the writing test in *katakana* by listening to English pronunciation. The result shows that listening to pronunciation correctly and understanding the pronunciation, intonation and omissions of pronunciation are factors of being good at dictation. On the other hand, this is thought to be the reason why dictation is considered difficult; spoken English is too fast and too rhythmic to catch.

Strong correlations were found between the dictation test and the writing test of seeing pronunciation written in *katakana*. To put it plainly, what learners do not know, they can not catch. The factor in doing dictation perfectly is to know the imaging of consecutive words and to be able to rewrite English, seeing English pronunciation written in *katakana*. Agreement of the variation in pronunciation actually spoken and knowledge of pronunciation realized by learners is necessary for an improvement in dictation.

Correlations were found between the two tests involving writing in *katakana* after hearing English pronunciation and writing in English after seeing English pronunciation written in *katakana*. Accordingly, learners can not catch English without creating an image of the variation in pronunciation. It is suggested that training in precise listening is necessary.

It was examined whether the knowledge of vocabulary or knowledge of pronunciation is exertive on the point of dictation. As a result, both correlation and partial correlation of knowledge of variation in pronunciation is stronger than those of knowledge of vocabulary. This is to say that learning variation in pronunciation the same as learning vocabulary makes stronger vocabulary building. By giving the information about variation in pronunciation in *katakana*, it is possible for the learner to understand it with comparative ease. It also becomes the motive of study as Kubo (1999) said. But not to be denied is the importance of vocabulary building considered usual for listening.



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