

The Phonology and Phonetics of Second Language Intonation in Case of “Downstep”

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Abstract : This study aims to investigate the acquisition process of intonation. It examines the intonation structure of Tokyo Japanese and its realization by Iranian learners of Japanese. Seven Iranian learners of Japanese, differing in fluency, and two Japanese speakers participated in the experiment. Two sentences were used to test the phonological and phonetic characteristics of lexical pitch-accent as well as the intonation patterns produced by the speakers. Both sentences consisted of similar words with the same number of syllables and lexical pitch-accents but different syntactic structure. Speakers were asked to read each sentence three times at normal speed, and the data were analyzed by Praat. The results show that lexical pitch-accent, Accentual Phrase (AP) and AP boundary tone realization vary depending on sentence type. For sentences of type *XdeYwo*, the lexical pitch-accent is realized properly. However, there is a rise in AP boundary tone regardless of speakers' level of fluency. In contrast, in sentences of type *XnoYwo*, the lexical pitch-accent and AP boundary tone vary depending on the speakers' fluency level. Advanced speakers are better at grouping words into phrases and produce more native-like intonation patterns, though they are not able to realize downstep properly. The non-native speakers tried to realize proper intonation patterns by making changes in lexical accent and boundary tone.

Keywords : intonation, Iranian learners, Japanese prosody, lexical accent, second language acquisition.

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