Communication Accommodation Theory and L2 Acquisition

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Abstract

One of the significant theories in linguistics is Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) developed by Giles in 1970s (West & Turner, 2010). According to this theory, interlocutors accommodate their speech toward each other while engaged in a conversation (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991; West & Turner, 2010). In a second language, L1 speakers may accommodate their L2 speaker peers in a different way compared to accommodating their L1 speaker peers. It has been reported that L1 speakers may accommodate L2 speakers by enhancing lax-tense vowel duration differences (Scarborough, Brenier, Zhao, Hall-Lew & Dmitrieva, 2007), or using vowel hyper-articulation (Uther, Knoll, & Burnham, 2007). It is argued in this paper that experience plays a major role in an individual’s internalization of the appropriate accommodation techniques. Following this argument, through purposive/purposeful sampling, where individuals who have the desired features are used as the research participants (Tongco, 2007); L1 speakers of Canadian English who had closely worked with L2 speakers were asked for participation to investigate the type of accommodation they use. The idea was to investigate the attributive vowel features experienced L1 speaker use while interacting with the L2 speakers. For the experiment, three sets of lax-tense vowels were assigned to a map as street names. The experiment included two tasks. First, each L1 speaker participant gave directions on the map to L1 peers. Next, each L1 speaker gave directions on the same map to L2 peers. The conversations were audio-recorded and later analysed for vowel duration and formant frequencies. The results show that there is minor significant differences between vowel durations and formant frequencies comparing the two tasks, i.e. addressing L1 peers versus L2 peers. However, use of more (proto)typical vowel duration and formant frequencies were observed in Task 2 compared to Task 1.

Keywords: Communication Accommodation Theory, vowel duration, vowel colour, SLA
References


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