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Creation of a Technology-Based Pronunciation Evaluation System to Foster Autonomous Pronunciation Acquisition for Second Language Learners and Enhance Independent Learning

ABSTRACT

This article is a reflection about my first attendance at a conference. At the LD30 Conference, I made a presentation about a study which aimed to explore effective ways to use technology to promote independent learning among second language learners. Specifically, the study focused on second language learners' acquisition of understandable pronunciation so that they can speak with confidence. In my study, I tried to find ways to enhance the ability of second language learners to acquire comprehensible pronunciation independently. The experience of attending this conference enabled me to understand better what it takes to be a researcher.

Keywords: reflection, education technology, pronunciation evaluation system

I initially did not want to attend an academic conference. However, my perception changed when I participated and presented my research process in the conference held at Gakushūin University on October 21st and 22nd, 2023. Being a part of LD30 altered my perspective on research and conference attendance. The purpose of this writing is to share my reflections from my experience at LD30.

The title of my presentation was “Creation of a Technology-Based Pronunciation Evaluation System to Foster Autonomous Pronunciation Acquisition for Second Language Learners and Enhance Independent Learning”. I am deeply interested in both education and technology especially as world changing inventions such as generative AI are being created today. I enjoy contemplating how current advanced technology can aid second language learners and the opportunities technology-integrated education can create for learners' development. As a graduate student specializing in media at Komazawa university, my goal was to develop something beneficial for students studying English. Although my primary role is that of a student, I also teach English to adults. These experiences piqued my interest in creating such a tool. As a student myself, I observed that lack of confidence in pronunciation often hindered my classmates from speaking their second language during discussions at my university. This led me to believe that having confidence in pronunciation is a crucial skill in real-life communication, yet not many language educators in modern classrooms focus on this aspect.

From a teacher's standpoint, I noticed during listening activities that students struggled to comprehend words they were already familiar with. This experience emphasized the need for individualized pronunciation learning opportunities. I dedicated half a semester to developing a pronunciation evaluation system. However, as I delved deeper into research and development, I began losing focus and interest. I found myself more intrigued by observing classroom phenomena rather than solely creating a system. Despite my wavering commitment, I felt obligated to attend the conference, though I saw little meaning in presenting a poster for a project I had halted. It was my first conference attendance, which made me question if I was the right person to participate.

The 21st was the day of my poster presentation. Upon completing registration, numerous participants warmly welcomed me. Contrary to my expectations of a cold atmosphere, I encountered a friendly environment. Additionally, the presentation style differed significantly from what I anticipated. I had expected presenters to solely showcase research results while the audience listened passively. However, at LD30, many presenters encouraged discussions, sharing their teaching experiences and perspectives to enhance teaching methods. One reason I had initially hesitated to attend academic conferences was the perceived tendency for participants to be overly critical. However, the warm atmosphere at LD30 provided hope of gaining ideas from both teachers and students to further my research. During my presentation, many teachers and students approached me in a friendly manner and engaged with my poster presentation.

Surprisingly, the adjacent presentation focused on the necessity of revamping English education in Japanese schools to foster inclusivity within society. It aimed to explore potential links between discrimination, exclusive mindsets, and English education, proposing inclusive teaching approaches for societal unity. This presentation resonated with mine as the presenter also discussed English as a lingua franca. It prompted me to question how my system should evaluate pronunciation if native English speakers couldn't comprehend English spoken between non-native speakers, yet they understood each other. Consequently, it became evident that evaluating pronunciation is a complex task. Additionally, a teacher asked about the criteria I applied. I mentioned three criteria: accuracy, fluency, and completeness. Subsequently, the teacher inquired if I had additional criteria to consider. One feature I contemplated for the system was including a function for learners to perform self-assessment using five criteria, enabling them to identify the pronunciation features they were confident in. The teacher suggested that while adding more features might enhance usability, a successful system should remain simple. This advice made me realize that adding more features increased the system's complexity, although I aimed to create a tool for students to autonomously acquire understandable pronunciation.

I appreciated the numerous teachers and students who shared their teaching and learning experiences about pronunciation. One student concurred that a lack of pronunciation skills demotivated students from speaking aloud. Although I temporarily suspended this project, my interest in education and technology remains. This experience prompted me to reassess my current project. Several teachers discussed EduTech, indicating widespread interest in the coexistence of education and technology.

By the end of the LD30 conference, I found myself rejuvenated by the diverse perspectives shared. While initially disheartened by suspending my pronunciation evaluation system project, the discussions reshaped my approach. Conversations about EduTech reignited my passion for innovative educational technologies, particularly in language acquisition. The conference underscored the intricate link between education, technology, and societal inclusivity, broadening my perspective. LD30 wasn't merely a platform for research presentations; it was a transformative space for communal learning. Leaving the conference, I am inspired to research more accessible tools that bridge the gap between technology and effective pedagogy, reaffirming my commitment to empowering both learners and educators.