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STUDY OF PHONOLOGY STRUCTURES AMONG IRANIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract: This phenomenon that bilingual learners are not able to pronounce some sounds in English Language. This issue has been the main concerns of different studies in the field English language teaching (ELT). Researchers and experts in this ELT have payed to challenges by non-native English speakers from different aspects such as psychological, environmental, physical and psychological. Although different studies attempted to unfold the questions which may influences factors in learning a second language, there are many different points that are attractive for experts such as cross linguistic. The same as other second language learners, Iranian learners could be included in this category. They have problem in English pronunciation and sounds such as /θ/ and /w/ and pronouncing consonant cluster (CC). It might have different reasons such as mother tongue and lack of a good teacher and EFL text books. For that reason, this study is going to evaluate and criticize Iranian pronunciation in terms of cross linguistic. Therefore, 3 EFL students form EvazPayam-e-Nour University were selected and qualitative method were administered. Then, their proficiency levels in English language have been examined 3 times in one semester.

Keywords: *bilingual, Second language learner, English sounds, Iranian pronunciation*

I INTRODUCTION

Many experts and researchers have been attempting to solve issues that make question marks in Teaching English language such as cross linguistic and phonological structure. These issues have been main concerns of different researchers for decades like Larry Slinker. Larry Slinker(1992) in his study unfolded hypothesis in second language acquisition(SLA) and attempted to point his finer towards issues such as variables and language transfer in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) which have been the main issues for learner in learning second language and attempted to discuss critically.

To define in this concept, Odlin(1989)explained these issues from different perspectives and pointed out the differences between first language and target language. She underlined similarities in first and second language that put effective impact in learning, and also believed that these similarities may increase systematic problems for learners in learning second language.

Currently, due to the appearance of modern technologies such as computer and mass media, there is more

emphasis on oral language than on a writing system. Therefore, it is understandable that researchers in second language acquisitions (SLA) put more emphasis on oral skills in English Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. In this way, researchers have attempted to put more emphasis in EFL textbooks on oral skills such as listening, pronunciation and speaking ability rather than other skills. In completing this issue, Majid Hayati (2008) extended this topic and stated that there are many different factors playing major roles in this issue. These factors, which are more important in speaking skills, may be divided into environmental, physical, instructional and psychological issues. In addition, although factors such as physical or environmental issues are very important, it should be examined in two different sections: internal and external, which are related to teachers and students separately.

According to Mohammad Reza Ghorbani (2008), Iranian learners have faced these kinds of problems, which can be analyzed from different aspects. However, there are other reasons, such as lack of emphasis on aural and oral skills in EFL textbooks in Iran that could be added to this idea as well.

II PROBLEM STATEMENT

By the study of second language acquisition, it may be assumed that some learners have phonological problems in the target language. Evidence from the study of inter-language could be related to systematic transfer. There are different sounds in English language that cause problem and out learners in a difficult situation for pronouncing them. According to Schmidt (1990), the pronunciation of the /θ/ sound caused learners in difficulty with different languages. M. Hayati (2008) found in his study that the distance existing between English and Persian language and the acquisition of second language phonetic structures, which are influenced by the first language's role. Consequently, learners make problems in producing sounds like /ð/ and attempt to borrow some sound from their first language such as /z/. Hence, Iranian second language learners have an unconsciously tendency toward their mother tongue and influence their pronunciation.

III AIM OF THE STUDY/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to E. Tarone (2005) pronunciation of second language learners could be analyzed from the learners' speech. It should be noted that changes in the phonological aspect of the language performance could not be directly linked to a single factor. An experienced teacher could enhance a learner's ability in acquisition of English sounds in the context of speech.

This study will report on the learners' progressive of inter- language. Iranian translation students at Payam-e-Noor Evaz University, one of the cities in Fars province, were selected purposefully to evaluate the following research questions:

- 1) How much learners are success in pronouncing of /θ/ and /w/sound?
- 2) To what extent, have learners been successful in the acquisition of consonant cluster/CC/ in the English language classroom?

IV REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the context of analyzing second language learners' speech, E. Tarone (2005) discussed form and function. In her definition of language forms, she stated that —Second language speakers who attempt to produce second language forms orally do not, in fact, produce linguistic forms alike to those produced by native speakers; rather they produce inter-language forms. The inter-language is the linguistic system evidenced when an adult second language learner attempts to express meanings in the language being learned (p. 486). She believed that learners use formal rules in the target language, but it is not the rule of their native language.

V INTER LANGUAGE

Some studies pointed out the degree of difficulty in acquisition of L2 phonology. Learners of a second language, due to lack of proficiency, borrow some phonology from L1 and add to the second language acquisition. As Timothy Moson (2008) noted on the idea of inter-language that L2 learners use a language system which is neither the L1, nor the L2. He argued that learners' uses their own grammar or lexicon that could be defined as third language, which they transfer from their mother tongue. Put simply, learners in the acquisition language stretch their mother tongue. As an example, in the lexical level, a teaspoon may be transformed as a little spoon'. At the level of phonology, the learner uses a second language (L2) rule in situations in which a native speaker would not use in their language.

According to Lado (1957), in the constructive analysis hypothesis, examining learners' first language phonology helps researchers to discover the difficulties in acquisition of a second language. Charles B. Chang (2008) introduces bilinguals as the ones who are responsible for borrowings the second language. Hence learners attempt to find a way for learning second language and reach the simplest way that is transferring phonological features from their mother tongue to the target language while Selinker (1992) warned L2 learners that should be sensitive and avoid comparing linguistic system.

VI METHODOLOGY- PARTICIPANTS

The Iranian EFL learners studying including 3 students (1 male & 2 female) in the field of English Translation in Evaz Payam-e-Noor University were selected. They were fairly from similar age ranging from 18 to 25 and had almost the same English proficiency level background in terms scoring. They have to pass 124 units of English language during their studying in university; 4 semesters for general English language and 4 semesters for ESP courses. It should be noted that they were studying in semester four and also the last semester that they were studying general courses.

VII DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Qualitative method of data sampling will be administered which explains the limited number of the participants. Participants are going to be interviewed three times within a range of three months with the distance of at least one month. Each interview will be sound-recorded and will take from 10 to 20 minutes. Next, the voice recordings are transcribed according to the latest conventions. To ensure the ethical aspects of the research, they will be informed about the fact that their interviews are being sound recorded.

VIII RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Participant A

Participant A was a 20 female that showed very curiosity to take part in research. In three interval of time, we manage to extract the interval language data. The developmental stages of his progress are shown in table 1.

As it can be seen, in Table 1, four phonological variables were monitored including 1 beginning consonant clusters of CC, 2) ending consonant cluster of CCC 3)/w/ sounds and 4) /θ/ sound.

The frequency statistics indicate that participate A was at a middle level of the phonological process. Even after

receiving four month of English language training. He displays a form of plateau.

In some cases, it seems that his attempt is not going to show any fluctuate at phonological development table. Yet, the very acceptable percentage of 50 might be a little misleading. However, it can be inferred that he had already acquired /w/ sound.

A close look at data gathered from of participant A, who was at the point of early stages of second language learning, produced /w/ sound for the first time immediately after the interviewer pronounced it correctly. It could be assign of self correction.

Table 1: Phonological development in participate A. Interlanguage

	Participant A						Average
	First Pool		Second Pool		Third Pool		
	incident	correct	incident	correct	incident	correct	
1.begining CC	4	5	5	5	6	4	50%
	50%		50%		50%		
	2.ending CCC	8	2	9	1	8	
3./W/ sound	2	8	3	7	3	7	80%
	80%		90%		70%		
4./θ/ sound	5	5	4	6	6	4	50%

Table 2: Phonological development in participate B. Inter-language

	Participant B						Average
	First Pool		Second Pool		Third Pool		
	incide nt	correct	incident	correct	incident	correct	
1.begining CC	2	8	1	9	0	10	90%
	80%		90%		100%		
	2.ending CCC	8	2	9	1	9	
3./W/ sound	5	5	3	7	3	7	70%
	50%		70%		70%		
4. /θ/ sound	5	5	5	5	2	8	60%

Participant B

Table 2 shows the interview with a 20 male student. It shows the very high interest of learning the second language. He actively attempts in class activity and tried his best interview in phonological development. It should be added that he passed some private classes in English language institute before entering university.

The descriptive statistics shows that participant B is aware of using consonant clusters of CC about 90%. On the other hand, he was completely unsuccessful of ending consonant cluster CCC.

Besides, he approximately got acceptable percentages in pronouncing /w/ and /θ/ sounds. It seems that it has been

enough attempts by him in the class and could be improve by more involving in class activities.

Participant C

Participant C (table 3) was a 25 female student. She was very interesting in participating class activities. She got very high score in consonant cluster/CC/ and /θ/ sounds. It seems that she has put much more stress and extra exercises in these sound that are capable to pronounce them correctly while in ending consonant cluster/CCC/ and /W/ got failed. A brief analysis in the two other sounds seems that she needs much more practice and have to put more stress in these sound to improve and correct these sounds correctly.

Table 3: Phonological development in participate C. Inter-language

	Participant C						Average
	First Pool		Second Pool		Third Pool		
	Incident	correct	incident	correct	incident	correct	
1.begining CC	1	9	2	8	1	9	86%
	90%		80%		90%		
2.ending CCC	8	2	9	1	8	2	Very low number of attempts
3./W/ sound	9	1	7	3	8	2	Very low number of attempts
4./θ/ sound	3	7	4	6	1	9	73%

IX ANTICIPATED FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the study will create a report on the developmental processes in the acquisition of phonological structures by Iranian EFL learners at Payam-e-Noor University. Although Participant A displayed high performance in consonant cluster /CC/, it seems that she couldn't overcome to her mother language and a trace of Persian language has been seen. While participant B performs approximately high performance in consonant cluster, /w/ and /θ/ sound. He proved to be higher in terms of proficiency, but he has some problems in pronouncing ending consonant cluster. Participant C seems improving her proficiency. Although she was in acceptable level in pronouncing consonant level and /θ/ sound, she completely was in low level of attempting in pronunciation of ending consonant cluster and /w/ sound.

The result of this study shows that monitoring developmental processes in the acquisition of phonological structures in time span like one semester to getting a high level of acquisition is much more difficult. It is clear that

learned structures is much different than acquired structures and need much more practice and hard working.

The results of the study could be applied in conduction further investigations to explain more on the issues of the phonological structure acquisition. In addition, teachers and administrators can find out why the learners are not good at some cases. Moreover, higher variety in data may lead into new perspective.

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