

CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE IN SECOND LANGUAGE PHONOLOGY

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Abstract

This article explores the issue of phonological interference that arises in the process of second language acquisition. Phonological interference refers to the influence of a speaker's native language sound system on the pronunciation of a target language. The paper highlights the major causes of such interference, including the absence of equivalent phonemes in the learner's first language, differences in articulation habits, and phoneme positioning within words. Examples from various language pairs are provided to illustrate how native phonology affects second language pronunciation. Furthermore, the article presents practical strategies for minimizing phonological interference, such as phonetic training, contrastive phoneme analysis, and the use of authentic audio materials. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of developing phonological awareness in order to achieve accurate and intelligible pronunciation in a foreign language.

Keywords: Cross-linguistic influence, second language acquisition, phonological transfer, L1 interference, phonemic contrast, phonological interference, pronunciation errors, phonemic differences, interlanguage phonology.

Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), phonology represents one of the most challenging domains for learners. Unlike grammatical or lexical components, which can often be explicitly taught and memorized, the phonological system of a second language (L2) requires deeper perceptual and productive adjustments. One of the key factors influencing the acquisition of L2 phonology is the learner's first language (L1). This phenomenon, known as **cross-linguistic influence (CLI)**, refers to the impact of previously acquired linguistic knowledge on the learning and use of another language. Phonological CLI can manifest in various ways, including transfer of individual phonemes, prosodic features, or even entire phonotactic structures from L1 to L2. While some influences may facilitate learning through *positive transfer*, others may hinder accurate pronunciation and lead to persistent *phonological interference* or *negative transfer*. Understanding the nature and mechanisms of such influence is essential not only for theoretical linguistics but also for practical language teaching and pronunciation training. Phonological interference is one of the most common causes of pronunciation errors in language learning. It affects not only individual sounds (phonemes), but also intonation, syllable structure, and speech rhythm. While this interference is a natural part of the learning process, it can lead to reduced intelligibility and may hinder effective communication if not addressed properly.[2]



Phonological interference occurs when native language phonemes, stress patterns, or intonation influence the way a learner pronounces words in a second language. Unlike grammar or vocabulary mistakes, pronunciation errors caused by phonological interference are often unconscious and harder to correct without focused training. Learners tend to apply familiar articulatory patterns from their mother tongue to the new language, leading to distorted or incorrect sound production. Phonological interference refers to the influence of a speaker's native language sound system on the pronunciation of a second or foreign language. This type of interference occurs when the learner applies the phonetic and phonological rules of their first language (L1) to the second language (L2), often unconsciously. As a result, learners may substitute unfamiliar sounds with those they already know, misplace stress, or transfer rhythm and intonation patterns from their native tongue.[3]

One of the most common issues resulting from phonological interference is mispronunciation. Learners often substitute sounds from their L1 that do not exist in the L2. For example, a Spanish speaker might struggle with the English "v" sound, substituting it with a "b" sound, leading to confusion between words like "very" and "berry." [4] Additionally, vowel sounds that are similar may be confused, such as the difference between "bit" and "beat," which can significantly affect meaning.

Phonological interference can also manifest in inconsistent stress and intonation patterns. Learners may apply the stress patterns of their L1 to L2 words, resulting in unnatural speech rhythms. For instance, a native French speaker may incorrectly stress syllables in English words, making their speech sound awkward. Similarly, differences in intonation can lead to misunderstandings, as variations in pitch can change the meaning of a sentence [5]

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology aimed at exploring the nature, causes, and impact of phonological interference among second language learners. The research focuses on identifying common patterns of pronunciation errors that result from native language influence, as well as the strategies used to minimize such interference.

1. Data Collection Methods

Literature Review:

A thorough review of scholarly articles, books, and previous research on phonological interference, contrastive analysis, and second language acquisition was conducted to build a theoretical framework for the study.

Observation and Audio Analysis:

Recordings of language learners speaking the target language (English) were analyzed to identify recurring phonological errors. Particular attention was given to sound substitution, stress misplacement, and intonation deviations.[6]

Interviews:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with language teachers and learners to gather insights about their experiences with phonological challenges, teaching techniques, and learner



perceptions.

2. Participants

The participants included:

10 second language learners (aged 15–20), whose native languages include Uzbek, Russian, and Persian.

3 experienced ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers working in language centers.

3. Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using contrastive phonological analysis, comparing the phonetic systems of the participants' native languages with English. Patterns of interference were categorized and interpreted based on frequency and impact on communication.[7]

4. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Identities of individuals were kept confidential, and recordings were used solely for research purposes.[8]

Conclusion

Phonological interference is a significant challenge in second language acquisition, particularly in the development of accurate pronunciation and effective oral communication. It arises when learners unconsciously apply the phonological rules and patterns of their native language to the target language, resulting in sound substitutions, stress errors, and intonation mismatches. These issues not only affect intelligibility but can also hinder a learner's confidence and fluency.

Understanding the causes of phonological interference—such as phonemic differences, articulatory habits, and prosodic patterns—is essential for both learners and educators. Through targeted strategies like phonetic training, contrastive analysis, and increased exposure to native input, the negative effects of interference can be reduced. Teachers play a vital role in identifying problem areas and guiding learners toward clearer and more native-like pronunciation.

Future research should continue exploring more nuanced aspects of CLI, including the influence of **prosody, intonation, stress patterns, and phonotactic constraints**. Additionally, examining phonological transfer in **multilingual settings** and among **heritage speakers** can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how multiple languages interact within the learner's cognitive and phonological systems. Such insights are essential for developing more effective teaching methods and pronunciation training programs tailored to specific learner backgrounds. Ultimately, addressing phonological interference is key to helping language learners achieve greater success in speaking and listening. It supports their overall communicative competence and fosters more meaningful interactions in the second language.

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