THE SOCIAL FACTORS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE PRONUNCIATION

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ABSTRACT

There are a lot of factors that might contribute to experiencing problems in speech production, such as age, accent, personality, social environment and instruction. Individual variation is a feature of SLA and should thus be taken into account when talking about L2 phonology acquisition. This study will take special interest in how social factors might affect speech production, because it seems to be very influential.

Keywords: Intelligible pronunciation, intonation, "lower class", "Cinderella of language teaching", ethnolinguistic community, exchange networks, Social embarrassment and frustration, English language networks.

INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Nowadays, English is the language used for international communication and speakers need to be able to exchange information effectively, both orally and in writing. According to Joan Morley, "intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence and one of the necessary components of oral communication". As others explain, "learners with good pronunciation in English are more likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, whereas learners whose pronunciation is difficult to understand will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect". Similarly, Burns claims: "clear pronunciation is essential in spoken communication. Even where learners produce minor inaccuracies in vocabulary and grammar, they are more likely to communicate effectively when they have good pronunciation and intonation". The importance of pronunciation in effective communication that "difficulties with pronunciation might mean that students fail to get their message across, even when the correct words are being used, or they might fail to understand what is said to them". Furthermore, another aspect to take into account is that people are often judged by the way they speak.

There are a lot of advantages to speak in an intelligible pronunciation. Here are some of them. A number of other studies of both children and adults have reported that individuals with heavily accented English are often thought of as "lower class", and what they say is discounted by others [1, 89-90p.]. The ability to speak in a standard way might be considered advantageous by some of those whose home language is a distinctly local form of speech; if their vocations require them to work in districts remote from their home locality, they would not be hampered by speaking in a manner differing considerably from the speech of those around them. A standard pronunciation would also be useful to foreign learner of English. Pronunciation instruction may facilitate listening comprehension ability [2, 56-58p.]. The same idea in a different way "When, for whatever reason, the encoded speech is nonstandard or different from what the decoder is expecting or accustomed to, communication can be limited, confused, or lost completely". We can understand those English much more easily if they are the same pronunciations in our mind.

Pronunciation, despite being known as an important component of language learning, has not been awarded due attention within the field of language education while it is undeniable that pronunciation is an important component in learning to speak a second language, its role in English programs varies greatly and time dedicated to it largely depends on the language teachers themselves, and there is no certainty that pronunciation is a part of regular class activities and student self-study. Even long before the advent of the communicative era, many scholars posited that pronunciation was not paid as much attention to as other skills. Kelly for example, suggests that pronunciation was the "Cinderella of language teaching" i.e., kept behind doors and out of sight.

There are a lot of factors which affect the SL learners' pronunciation. One of them is social factors. Social factors also greatly affect speaking, accent and the attitude towards one's own accent, and so sociolinguistics has been important in explaining variation in L2 phonology [3, 221p.]. Language learning is not only a process of learning new knowledge, it is also a process of acquiring symbolic elements of a different ethnolinguistic community [4, 191p.]. Also, people are not only passive recipients of the target language, and so there are social variables that influence speaking as well, for instance peer pressure or other social dynamics. People around the learner affect the way he sees himself as a user of the language. This includes people from the same language group as well as people who speak the target language as a first or a second language for example, the target language community's expectations of non-native speaker assimilation may have a significant role in learning a language. Interaction is very important in SLA. However, if the learner does not feel comfortable with the people he could practice the language with, interaction might become difficult. "Variation in production is typically systematic and may be due, in part, to social marking due to gender, identity, accommodation to the interaction, and the linguistic environment, etc." Thus, the reason for the differences between the TL and the TL produced by the learner might be due to the learner trying to speak a non-standard variety of the language or wanting to talk a certain variety with the interlocutor [5, 123-25p.]. So, the way people perform the TL may be socially conditioned. In addition, this questions how much of people's FL/L2 performance is due to their skills as language learners, and how much is due to how they construct their identity in the language. Fear of not being understood, for instance because of one's accent, might also cause anxiety and prevent the learner from speaking [6, 168-171p.]. As adults typically see themselves as reasonably intelligent, socially adept and socio-culturally skillful individuals, having to communicate in a foreign language limits one's communicative choices. Children are often praised for their efforts, but adults are often "embarrassed by their lack of mastery of the language and they may develop a sense of inadequacy after experiences of frustration in trying to say exactly what they mean". Additionally, an accent may trigger foreigner talk from native speakers, the point of which is to enhance communication [7, 59-62p.]. However, for some learners this might emphasize the feeling of not being on the same level with the native speakers, which may be a status related issue for some. Social embarrassment and frustration might thus prevent adult learners from speaking a FL. Then again, this way they might not practice speaking and it might become all the more difficult. "Pronunciation is a domain within which one's identity is expressed" [8, 201-202p.]. In L2 phonology, social identity has been studied through the use and acquisition of certain sounds and their variants, and how they function as social markers of identity. For example, certain sounds may have nationalistic meaning. Ethnological affiliation may cause language learners to hold back from talking too much like a member of a different language group, because of a strong sense of affiliation to their primary ethnological group. Studies that support this are, for example, French-Canadian learners of English, and how their use of interdental fricatives was a means of expressing one's identity or nationality: non-nationalistic informants used the English dental fricative more than the

nationalistic informants [9, 98-99p.]. However, based on the present author's interviews with adult learners of English, for instance, it seems that Uzbek adult learners of English often do not want other people to notice their nationality when speaking English. This raises a lot of questions, for example, why this is and whether Uzbeks do not have a strong sense of nationality. Another example of research that has studied social identity in connection to SLA is Moyer's (2004) study, which focused on immigrants in Germany. One of the results was that confidence in using the L2 was closely related to how the informants managed to develop social contacts with German speakers and also how they managed to create a viable L2 identity, which was difficult for some of them. Then again, acquiring more confidence made them feel more like they were part of the L2 culture. Thus, social networks are an important factor in SLA. The three types of network structures that a language learner might have. These three network structures are: exchange networks made up of ties with family and close friends, interactive networks constructed of ties with acquaintances, and passive networks that consist of physically distant ties [10, 68-72p.]. The learners who have exchange networks are socially and psychologically less distanced from the L2 culture, and so they will learn the L2 a lot more easily than learners that only have interactive or passive networks. He also says that people who are in contact with exchange networks are more open to language variation and will likely use the same variety as their exchange network. For most Uzbek adult learners of English social connections with English speakers are likely quite rare, and if there are any English language networks, they most likely consist of acquaintances or passive networks. It is possible to hear a lot of English in Uzbekistan, for example through the media, but the chances of speaking English are quite rare, similarly to other countries, as very few learners seem to want to practice speaking with their Uzbek speaking friends. This brings us back to social identity: as Moyer noticed, developing contacts with the target language community helped in creating an L2 identity. So, because of the lack of English speaking networks, Uzbek learners may not have a clear idea of who they should be or how they should act when speaking English.

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