

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Pronunciation Difficulty of Kamayo Learners: A Case Analysis

Mardie E. Bucjan

Associate Professor, Surigao del Sur State University, Philippines

Abstract:

This paper investigated the pronunciation difficulty of the Kamayo learners. Specifically this study aimed to: know if the interference of the first language caused this difficulty; point out the common pronunciation difficulty of these learners and propose an intervention activity or design materials to improve pronunciation skills in the second language. This study employed qualitative and quantitative method of research hence, the used of oral test and FGD or focused group discussion. The primary reason of their difficulty is on the interference of their first language where the accent of their first language is carried over as they speak the second language. There are other intervening factors which caused this difficulty on pronunciation among these learners as namely: 1.) seldom usage of the second language, exposure and used of the language is only in the classroom; 2.) educational background and family background; 3.) exposure to reading materials and other forms of media. It is further concluded that the learners are having pronunciation difficulty specifically on some consonants and vowel sounds. Having this available information, a set of intervention materials such as modules and SIM Strategic Intervention Materials shall be designed to help them improve their pronunciation difficulty. The need for instructional materials which are readily available is considered very essential.

Keywords: pronunciation, intervention materials, Kamayo, difficulty

1. Introduction

One of the basic skills to be developed among the learners is oral communication. Oral communication plays a vital role in the learners' lives. This is true because much of the learners' daily activities in school involve the use of oral skills. Thus, the need to communicate effectively is deemed necessary. This paper investigated the pronunciation difficulty of the Kamayo learners. Specifically this study aimed to: know if the interference of the first language caused this difficulty; point out the common pronunciation difficulty of these learners and propose an intervention activity or design materials to improve pronunciation skills in the second language.

According to Fernando et.al (1998) effective oral communication is dependent upon a number of factors such as fluency of speech, the ease with which the person carries on conversation, adequacy of vocabulary, articulation and pronunciation. For this reason, effective communication is achieved if the learners are equipped with the basic knowledge on communication skills, basically pronunciation. As Murcia and Goodwin(1991) in (Eskenazi,2002) stresses that effective communication cannot take place without correct pronunciation because poor phonetic and prosody can distract the listener and impede comprehension of message. In so many times mispronunciation meets misconception or misunderstanding due to lack of clarity on the words with whom the speaker is trying to convey.

A number of language teachers lament that it is not easy to acquire good pronunciation due to several reasons. Mendoza (1972) as cited by Ponce (1999) points out that one of the major causes of this difficulty is the interference of the habits in the native language, which is carried over to the learner's English usage. Thus, this leads to serious impediment to learning the pronunciation of the target language.

Most native speakers run into several problems in their effort to acquire the sound system of the second language that is because of the transference of the individual speech sounds of their first language. Lado (1957) in Rivera (1998) as cited by Emotin (2003) claims that there is an ample evidence that when learning a foreign language, people tend to transfer their entire native language system into the process.

The researcher herself agrees to the ideas aforementioned. As a language teacher, she has observed in her classroom that there are students who can hardly pronounce words correctly. As these learners speak the second language, the accent of their first language is carried over. Teaching the sound system of the English language to these students is usually a difficult task. The researcher finds out that these learners are the called "kamayo ". They are the learners coming from the towns of Marihatag, Lianga, Barobo, Tagbina, Hinatuan, Bislig and Lingig, all in the province of Surigao del Sur. The kamayo are the indigenous people of these places mentioned-above and their first language is called kamayo. They rooted from indigenous groups such as Manobo (from river towns nearby), Higaonon (the highlanders) and Mandaya (from Davao areas). Kamayo has some characteristics distinct from the language used by the rest of the towns in the province. Observations done by the researcher pointed to some peculiarities in the sounds and other speech acts of the Kamayo speakers. The characteristics are sometimes carried by the students when they used the English language in school. The investigation is focused on this inquiry.

1.1. Theoretical Background

This paper is anchored in the sociolinguistics perspective; according to Crowther, Rosploch, and Morscheiser, (2012) sociolinguistic theory focuses on the language and social aspects. The name Basil Bernstein is known as the one who developed the sociolinguistic theory, Littlejohn (2002) suggests that Bernstein's theory shows how the language people use in everyday conversation both reflects and shapes the assumptions of a certain social group. Furthermore, relationships established within the social group affect the way that group uses language, and the type of speech that is used.

This is also anchored in the theory of integrationists which say that language development is both biological and social, hence language learning is influenced by the desire of children to communicate with others. The main theorist associated with integrationist theory is Lev Vygotsky with his collaborative learning with the idea that conversations with older people can help children both cognitively and linguistically (Shaffer, et.al, 2002,) as cited by Spring Young(2002).

2. Methods and Design

This paper is descriptive in nature. It described the current scenario in the classroom which caught the attention of the researcher. It pays off that the need to give attention to this need in the class is deemed necessary. This paper is both quantitative and qualitative type of research. It is a quantitative because it used oral test to gather the data for objective number 2 and it is a qualitative because the researcher conducted FGD or focused group discussion with the respondents and other language instructors to answer objective number 1.

The researcher herself used purposive sampling technique in choosing her respondents from her English 3 class. She conducted profiling of the first language used among her students and finally come up with 15 students as respondents of the study. The profiling was the basis for the purposive sampling.

The researcher undertook the following steps in order to take action on this problematic situation in her class. The researcher conducted an oral test to the identified individual, a three point scale questionnaire was used to gather the data. There were three raters /instructors who were asked by the researcher to help her in the conduct of the study, while an oral test was conducted. The ratings were treated statistically using the weighted mean.

The researcher conducted word drills, phrases and sentences drills with the /b/ sound and /v/ sounds, /f/ and /p/ sounds, /d/ and /θ/, the vowel sounds /e/, /a/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ɔ/, /e/, /o/, /u/. After the conduct of the pronunciation drills, their difficulty is already noted. On the other hand, the researcher adopted an oral test in the work of Emotin (2003) Student's Needs Assessment on Pronunciation Skills. The focused was on the vowels, consonants and diphthongs sounds that are commonly mispronounced. In the conduct of the needs assessment; the researcher asked the help of her three co-instructors in the department to conduct the oral test. There are three instructors including the researcher rated each respondent on the oral test conducted. The used of a four -point scale based on Likert scale is being considered. It is described below;

1.00-1.49	(1) Excellent-generally accurate
1.50-2.49	(2) Satisfactory-some words are mispronounced
2.50-3.39	(3) Fair- moderately mispronounced
3.50-4.0	(4) Needs Improvement-severely mispronounced, uncultivated or illiterate

3. Results and Discussion

The researcher is a language instructor who teaches speech and oral communication for a number of years. It is observed that there are these students who speak differently from the rest of the students. This observation is common to other language instructors, who found out that these students are "kamayo". These students speak hard English whose accent is on their native language and some lapses in pronunciation are evident.

The result of the oral test conducted based on the ratings made by the three instructors revealed that the most common difficulty of the respondents lie on the specific vowel and consonant sounds; such as /b/, /t/, /f/, /θ/, /v/, /z/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ɔ/, /e/. These are the most apparent difficulty which is described as fair or moderately mispronounced.

It is noted that learners pronounced the words with /b/ and /v / sounds with no distinction. It is all sounded the same, the plosive/v/ sound, such as in the word "November" becomes "November", "Valentine card" as "Balentine card", "driver" as "driber", "drove" as "drob", "variety as "Bariety" and etc.

The sound /θ / in the initial sound of the word Theresa becomes /T/ "Teresa", 'tirsty' "thirsty", in the medial / θ / in the word "nothing" as "noting", "pathetic" to "patetic", and in the final / θ / in the words, "both, healthy, zenith and booth which are all sounded as /t/. This is apparent, where the respondents cannot produce the / θ / in all positions in a word, whether initial, medial and final. In the consonant sound /f /, such as in the word "fifteen", different, followed, fed and etc. the /f/ sound is sounded as /p/. Therefore, the /p/ and /f/ are produced in the same manner or of no distinction at all. This simply shows that the respondents have the difficulty in distinguishing the proper production of the words with /f/ sounds.

The revealing vowel sounds which are not produced correctly or where most respondents have difficulty in producing are the /æ / in the word black, cat, sat, grass, the /ɛ / pet, hen, fed, bread; the /ɔ / in the word sought, wrong, law and officer. The /e / sound in the word say, paper, may and decay. It was actually further noted that they have a hard accent in producing [æ], [ɛ] and [e] sounds.

The data above revealed that generally the learners are having pronunciation difficulty based on the needs analysis conducted by the researcher.

While the researcher conducted an FGD with the respondents. The researcher found out that basically their difficulty on pronunciation lies primarily on the interference of their first language. To quote "*panagsahi ra isab sa gayud kami mag storya nan ininglis, kunay ini ra pag ini sa skol*" we seldom speak English, only when we are in the classroom". This statement of the student gives the researcher an idea that since the students are only exposed to L2 in school hence, less opportunities to use it. Much of their exposure is on the use of L1 where the other sounds such as /b/,/t/,/f/,/θ/,/v/,/z/,/ɛ/,/æ/,/ɔ/,and/e/ are not found, thus they only learn it in formal teaching in school.

One respondent commented "*lahi i ra sa isab gayud magpronounce kanami tiser sauna*" our teachers before do not pronounced it as you do". It boils down to the idea that students whose educational background in past is not so rigid as to the emphasis of pronunciation, shortly affects their performance at present. It is noted also by the researcher that this learner who come from schools in the far flung areas of the province do not do well in pronunciation.

On the other hand, most of them whose parents are illiterate (have not gone to school or less educated) are those found to have difficulty in pronunciation. Others have said "*kulang lang sa praktis*" lack of practice but for some "*OA man gud kadayaw ang pagpronounce wara sa ma anad sian*" it sound OA and we are not used to it." *Amu sa gud kami ini sopo mag storya sa baray*" this is really the way we speak at home. One respondent said, "*wara sa gud kanami mga reading materials, aron usahay ka Webster dictionary sa baray, tapos isab bag ohi ra isab kanami TV*" "we have no reading materials aside from a single Webster dictionary at home and we just have our television lately."

Based on the interview conducted, educational background and family background; exposure to reading materials and other forms of media help learners build their confidence to speak and pronounce well. As the way the respondents speak, the interference of their L1 greatly affects their pronunciation skills. As a whole these are just few of the factors which affect their performance in speech.

4. Conclusion/Generalization

Based on the study conducted, the researcher concludes that the primary reason of their difficulty is on the interference of their first language where the accent of their first language is carried over as they speak the second language. There are other intervening factors which caused this difficulty on pronunciation among these learners namely: 1.) seldom usage of the second language, exposure and used of the language is only in the classroom; 2.) educational background and family background; 3.) exposure to reading materials and other forms of media. It is further concluded that the learners are having pronunciation difficulty specifically on some consonants and vowel sounds. Having this available information, a set of intervention materials such as modules and SIM Strategic Intervention Materials shall be designed to help them improve their pronunciation difficulty. The need for instructional materials which are readily available is considered very essential.

5. References

- i. Crowther, Julie, Rosploch, Maria and Morscheiser, Jenny Sociolinguistic Theory and Literacy Development.
- ii. Emotin, Mardie. Pronunciation Difficulty of Kamyos Students of Barobo National High School: Basis for Developing Oral English Instructional Materials. 2003
- iii. Eskinenazi, Maxine. Using Automatic Speech Processing for Foreign Language Pronunciation Tutoring: Some Issues and A Prototype. Prototype.max@parle.speech.cs.cmu.edu.2002
- iv. Fernando, Jovita N. et.al English for Today. National Bookstore. Metro Manila, Philippines. 1988
- v. Ponce, Josefina M. Suggested Strategies in Teaching Oral Communication Skills to Grade To Pupils of San Juan Luna Elementary School. A Special Project.PNU Manila.1999
- vi. Spring Young, R. Basil Bernstein's Sociolinguistic Theory of Language Code
<http://zimmer.csufresno.edu/~johnca/spch100/3-3-bernstein.htm>.2002
- vii. Language Development. Theories of Language Development <http://languagedevelopment.tripod.com/id15.html>