

GETTING RID OF DIALECTOPHOBIA: A CONCERN FOR THE STUDENTS OF EDUCATION

Abdul Hameed Panhwar, Muhammad Khan Sangi,
Sanaullah Ansari and Dr. Tarique Umrani

ABSTRACT

Interest in learning English is at rise. Students confront a number of barriers in the way to learn English. Acquiring a particular accent/pronunciation of English is one of the issues of non native speakers of English. This paper deals with this issue at length through a qualitative research survey report covering the issue of people's and specifically students' anxiety of native dialect and accent. Linguists and scholars opine that although for the children under five years of age, it is easy to acquire a native like pronunciation of a foreign language, for adults, it is very difficult. Since in Pakistan the purpose of any foreign language is likely to be able to communicate successfully with the native speakers of that target language or with other people through this language, attention should be to focus on conveying the message correctly not necessarily with any of the native features of the target language.

Keywords: *dialectophobia, pronunciation/accent, native-like, close to native, acquire*

Introduction

Learning a foreign language, in case of some popular languages in the world, has become a trade mark of the new generation (Shamim, 2008; 2011). Some of them are successful in achieving their targets and some very badly fail due to their background especially elite schooling (Rahman, 1999). There are, indeed, obvious reasons of this success or failure. Our perspectives and attitudes behind handling the issue of foreign language learning have

a variety of reasons. Although the teachers try to facilitate their learners with the opportunities of learning a foreign language, there are also certain deliberate or unintentional barriers in the way of learning. Demanding or expecting to speak like or close to native speakers of the target language may be one of the major barriers in the way of learning a foreign language (Rahman, 2003; Bano, 2008; Shamim, 2011). It has been abundantly observed in Pakistan (Sindh) that students who come from village side or gove-

ment schools, having been taught English in their own mother tongue i.e. Sindhi / Urdu (in case of Sindh), face difficulties in a number of areas of English especially coping with the pronunciation of English (Rahman, 1996; 1999). Either the students from urban areas or English medium schools or even the teachers with relatively better background of English keep criticizing them for their poor pronunciation of English. Hence, instead of paying more attention to their major subject, the students with poor background to English spend most of their time in acquiring native-like pronunciation / accent of English. Consequently, along with poor result of their pronunciation struggle, they lose grip on their major subjects too.

Research Methodology

Documentary Survey Research

The documentary survey method appears to be especially suitable for the current study. Aylward (2003) argues that documentary survey helps in the interpretation of data in reconstructive research, as well as for

precluding concessions with a statistic and normative cultural concept. Ahmed, J. U. (2010) argues that the theoretical and methodological background of the study and exemplary results are presented. Hence, this research paper is likely to be written on the pattern of Survey Research. In the paper, the authors look into the views and observations of the researchers in the field of Sociolinguistics and make an attempt to reach an objective conclusion whether the learners in Pakistan learn a target language without being too much concerned about the native-like accuracy or they do care about necessary skills considered enough for the use of English (cf. Guba and Lincoln (1981).

Features of learning a foreign language

Graham (1969: 445) defines a particular feature of a language i.e dialectophobia, saying that in linguistics the word "accent" is used as a more general term for "stress." To the layman, it perhaps means speaking a language in a way that betrays the speaker's national or geographical background. This definition

clearly makes the general feature of pronunciation as something closely related to the native speakers of a language. Looking at the use and global importance of English, we may expect the non native speakers of English to be good at its grammatical structure, necessary stock of vocabulary, basic phrases and an understandable pronunciation. However, expecting one to be speaking English like the native do in spite of the fact of having learnt English at a later period in one's life, would be speaking too much. But it has been widely observed in our areas- it may be in academic institutions like schools, colleges, universities and even private language learning centers that a considerable emphasis is given on learning, trying and adopting a native like or close to native pronunciation of English. The absence of such unnaturally desired accent is believed to be lacking in the proficiency in English even if one is otherwise good at other linguistic features (Graham, 1969). Most of the students, as a result, forget to strive for their other major subjects or they get disheartened in their struggle to

cope with English and their major simultaneously.

Choice of Dialect or Accent

The question is whether the native-like pronunciation is to be given more attention, importance and time or it is the acceptability of understandability of English when used for communication to be considered sufficient. The effort to acquire a foreign language at the non-native level with non-native features is laudable or one must go for the features close to native speakers of a language. For example, Kettelkamp (1943: 383) states:

Nations must learn to speak and respect the languages of other nations. No common language as yet exists, but it is not at all improbable that certain well-known languages of today may eventually become international for commercial and political purposes.

Of course the difference within the same language or within different languages is marked usually with vocabulary, grammatical structure and pronunciation. As in different languages, we do respect the

vocabulary and grammatical structure for successful communication and understanding; we need to respect and acknowledge the same aspects and the difference of pronunciation within one and same language. Since the very purpose of a language is to be able to communicate for all practical purposes, we need to focus on the areas which serve best to meet the purpose of the existence of a language not the elements of secondary importance as spelling, form of words, accent and pronunciation.

According to Kettelkamp (1943), keeping in mind the demands of an increasing global world, either we have to reduce differences of the features of English or we have to moderate and condense the so called significance of these differences. There is a common belief that the international status of English gives us options to acquire or develop any accent / pronunciation of English that is understandable at least among a large number of English speaking people of an area (Rahman, 2003; Shamim, 2011). The frequently repeated statement,

"Isolationism is something of the past" is as applicable to languages as it is to economic and political fields. The concept of pluralism in the world cultures defies the artificial uniformity of any international language such as English (Kettelkamp, 1943: 383). Researchers and scholars of language have spoken a lot about the use of English accepting the difference of spelling, structure and pronunciation.

Acceptable differences in English

Differences in features of English do exist around the world, which have been discussed by a number of scholars. However, all those who speak about the acceptability of their usage not the other way round. Condoyannis (1944:588) distinguishes the variation in the use of pronunciation:

The word 'far' is likely to mislead people who speak with a Harvard accent as well as Southerners who shade the vowel in this word toward [ɜ :], while the a of pat is rarely, if ever, equivalent to the usual a in father, and certainly does not apply to the Dutch open a in vallen.

Hence, English, in the world, is used not as a uniform language but with its differences and divergence considered equally good for all practical purposes.

The flexible age of acquiring native like pronunciation / accent

In fact, after a particular age or period, it becomes almost impossible for an individual to acquire and adopt the native like pronunciation of a targeted foreign language. Asher and Garcia (1969) have explained the phenomenon of the process of acquiring pronunciation of a language. They describe various stages when the human brain behaves differently in its intake especially with regard to the pronunciation of a language. Examples would be the brain plasticity theory; the biological predisposition theory and an imprinting theory. All of these theories share a common theme which is that something in the early development of the child maximizes the probability that the younger the human organism when he is exposed to a language, the greater the pro-

bability that the individual will acquire a native pronunciation (Asher and Garcia, 1969: 334).

A natural fact holds that children at an early age are more flexible and stretchy towards acquiring the pronunciation of a foreign language more successfully than the adults (Asher and Garcia, 1969). Therefore, demanding children to come up with a native-like accent / pronunciation of English as a foreign /second language seems natural and adequate but demanding the same from adults seems unnatural and perverted as a matter of fact. This kind of inadequate demand eventually creates hindrances in one's way to pay proper attention to one's actual purpose of communication which is nothing but to convey one's message across. As a result, people start suffering from a "dialectophobia" which demands for acquiring a particular native like accent / pronunciation while speaking English. The fact is in case of children only expecting such learning will be fair. In this regard, Asher and Gracia (1969: 335) argue:

In language acquisition, the implication is that children have a biological predisposition for language learning which is perhaps related to brain plasticity or imprinting. Children may indeed have a pre-puberty biological predisposition which enables them to achieve fidelity in pronunciation.

After conducting a research survey, Asher and Garcia (1969: 446) came to conclude that before the age of six, if a child is exposed to a foreign language (English in case of their particular study), the chance of acquiring a native-like or a close to native accent/pronunciation is much stronger as compared to one exposed to English at around the age of 13 or so. The question then arises as to whether the music (in the sense of accent) of a language can have an autonomous existence. The answer has to be "No!" There are, in fact, many people who are able to communicate in one, two, three or even more foreign languages as easily and fluently as in their mother tongue. Also, although they have achieved native fluency with a thoroughly adequate pronunciation, they speak them all with at least

some of the music of their mother tongue. This even applies to outstanding scholars who have spent their lives studying the very language they speak with a foreign accent (Asher and Garcia, 1969).

Sometimes, authors happen to be very much ambitious about acquiring a particular status through the use of a foreign language. This is further elaborated by Asher and Gracia (1969:448-4451) in the following words:

But whatever the reasons may be, the fact does remain that it is this music that determines whether one is accepted as "one of ours" or "not one of ours". It is the one thing above all others that will confer nativeness on an individual.

The researchers also argue that, however, the question is whether one is desirous of naturalization into a foreign language or just the conveyance of message is the target. Hence, the authors end their paper with a mixed note of the absence and presence of the foreign accent in one's expression of a foreign language: "It is also that

part of a language whose absence need not impede communication but whose presence makes for the beauty and elegance of the language" (Asher and Garcia, 1969: 448-451).

We need to understand the limitation of acquiring a foreign accent/pronunciation. All our language learning abilities are primarily meant for our first language acquisition. This is why; the features that give one a native tone and impression are exhausted in the early age. In the older age, learning any other language is quite possible but not with the same result of native-like touch. However, for practical communication, one can achieve success very much like a native speaker. If flexibility of natural articulatory organ comes to an end at a particular time, expecting the same result from the speakers of a foreign language to perform same as the native speakers will be a bit too much and unnatural. Looking at the importance of English in the present times, people want to learn it to communicate in it with the people around the world. But unfortunately, demand of perfect or

native-like pronunciation from some so called speakers of native-like pronunciation of English makes things difficult for the rest of the people. Evans (1959: 33), similarly, points out the same fact of easiness and difficulty towards adopting the accent at a particular age:

Studies have shown that even five-year-olds can learn to speak and think in a foreign language fairly easily, for young children are relatively free of the vocal inhibitions of many older pupils and their speech organs are more flexible.

Conclusion

Thus, if we look at the pronunciation of English by the Chinese, Arabs, Japanese, Africans and even by many Europeans, we find distinguishable deviation from the native speakers of English. However, all of them are welcomed to communicate in their own pronunciation and accent. And internationally speaking, they are never criticized for their delivery of English as is done in our part of the world. Conclusively, it is not to speak necessarily like this or that, but it is to speak English the way

we do for in doing that we will be able to develop an independent style/variety of English that we will be able to use so frequently for all practical purposes, and this is what we can and this is what we need. We need to come out of the fear of adopting a particular dialect (dialectophobia) for fluent use of English to meet the needs of successful communication.

Reference:

- Ahmed, J. U. (2010) Documentary research method: New dimensions. *Indus Journal of Management & Social Sciences*, 4(1):1-14.
- Asher, J.J. and García. (1969) The Optimal Age to Learn a Foreign Language. *The Modern Language Journal*, 53(5), pp. 334-341: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/323026> Accessed: 20-01-2016
- Aylward, D. K. (2003) A documentary of innovation support among New World wine industries. *Journal of Wine Research*, 14(1), 31-43.
- Bano, M., 2008b. Non-profit education providers vis-à-vis the private sector: comparative analysis of non-governmental organizations and traditional voluntary organizations in Pakistan. *Compare*, 38(4), pp. 471-482.
- Condoyannis, G.E. (1944) Some Difficulties in Defining Pronunciation on Paper. *The Modern Language Journal*, 28(7), pp. 587-589: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/319297> Accessed: 20-01-2016
- Evans, N.D. (1959) Planning for a Foreign-Language Program. *The Elementary School Journal*, 60(1), pp. 32-36: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/999519> Accessed: 20-01-2016
- Graham, R. S. (1969) The Music of Language and the Foreign Accent. *The French Review*, Vol. 42(3), pp. 445-451 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/386283> Accessed: 20-01-2016
- Guba, E. and Y.S. Lincoln. 1981. Effective Evaluation: Improving the Usefulness of Evaluation Results through Responsive and Naturalistic Approaches. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Kettelkamp, G.C (1943) The Problem of Selecting a Foreign Language. *The Modern Language Journal*, 27(6), pp. 382-385 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/317547> Accessed: 20-01-2016
- Kramersch, C. (2000) Second Language Acquisition, Applied Linguistics, and the Teaching of Foreign Languages. *The Modern Language Journal*, 84(3), pp. 311-326 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/330563>. Accessed: 20-01-2016.

Rahman, T. (1996) Language and politics in Pakistan. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Rahman, T. (1999) The language of employment: The case of Pakistan. Research

Report Series # 23. Islamabad: The Sustainable Development Policy Institute.

Rahman, T. (2003) Education in Pakistan: A survey. SPO discussion paper series. Islamabad: Strengthening Participatory Organization.

Shamim, F. (2011) English as the language for development in Pakistan: Issues, challenges and possible solutions. In: H. Coleman, ed. 2001. Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language. London: British Council, pp. 291-311.