

English Teachers' Strategies to Work with the Phonetic Interference of Spanish Language on English Language Learning in Students of Esmeraldas City

Mario Marlon Montes Montaño (mario.montes@pucese.edu.ec)

English Teacher, La Providencia School, Esmeraldas, Ecuador



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Abstract: *To analyze the strategies that English teachers use to work with the phonetic interference of the Spanish language on English learning with the purpose of helping students to improve English skills while they are learning it as a new language, an explorative-qualitative-quantitative research was carried out to some English teachers of different levels from some educational institutions in the year 2020. The population and the sample consisted of 36 English teachers of Esmeraldas city. The methods of investigation used were analysis and synthesis, the hermeneutic method was applied to analyze the information have got and the technique used was the survey. The results showed that teachers said that their students had the Spanish phonetic interference especially in TH/Ø/, S/s/, A/æ/ sounds. Teachers mentioned that the strategies they use to work with phonetic interference of the Spanish language on English learning were to correct students in a general way, to listening and repeating the words several times. In addition, usually they used native speakers' audios in their classes to work with the interference of the Spanish language on English learning because they want to develop it properly.*

Keywords: English Learning, Linguistic Interference, Phonetic Interference, Spanish Language

Introduction

Language is the principal resource that allows communication between human beings since the beginning of humanity. Presently, English is the most important language around the world. Bone (2019) mentioned "in some educational institutions, the teaching of this is fundamental by the global communication and great number of people has decided to learn it" (p.1). English is a large language it is useful as an effective tool in many countries to promote social, health, economic and educational growth.

Therefore, communication is one of the main objectives of many people from different countries, culture, tradition or habits. To speak a similar language is suitable in order to share information. English is a universal language which is more spoken around the world. It is widely used by people to communicate due to the importance that English has to engage them with native speakers and get properly information.

Currently, English as a Foreign Language is not widely spoken in Ecuador, just a few educational institutions have the elementary equipment to teach this language, and the deficient quantity of instruments such as laboratories, books, and Internet services that involve students, tools that engage with the development of the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) Bone (2019); as well as grammar, the phonetic system, etc. surrounded by all these factors, which strike the learning process of this language.

The pronunciation has relevant importance in the communication process because the speakers can understand the message. The profit of pronunciation is to make the correct sounds of a particular language that will join in the flow of speech (Susan & Boyer 2008). According to this research, the importance of the influence of the first language (mother tongue) on foreign language has been a very important influence for a long time. It has caused serious problems between teachers and students because the pronunciation and comprehension are fundamental in the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language.

There are several phonemes in Spanish that have a resemblance to English phonemes; it is there that students get confused when they speak. This is why this research focuses on the phonetic influence aspect

that is based on the influence of Spanish language (L1) on the learning of English as a foreign language (L2) and the strategies teachers may use to work or diminish this influence. Therefore, the proposed research problem is: What are the teachers' strategies to work with the phonetic interference of the Spanish language on English language learning?

When people begin to learn a new language, most of the time native language interferes in the new language. For instance, different names have been assigned by the first language likewise mother tongue, native language, and primary language. People need to learn another language for education, employment, and other purposes, and it is typically an official or social language (e.g. English). A growing body of researches was done on the first language transfer in second language acquisition.

In the teaching-learning process, Spanish native speakers make phonetic interferences in some similar words they think these words have the same pronunciation in both languages, for that reason students cannot pronounce words correctly and think learning English is difficult. However, English teachers have to look for and use different strategies to apply all their knowledge in order to get better results and relevant learning of English. Therefore, it was meaningful to carry out this research it contributed, with valuable and useful information, to the development of the English language teaching in Esmeraldas.

The direct beneficiaries are going to be the students where the study is going to be carried out. The data collected in this investigation will help English teachers to create and include in their classes strategies to work with the phonetics interference of Spanish in learning English, which can offer students the possibility to improve their pronunciation. Taking into consideration the differences between phonetic sounds in Spanish and English language, as a result of that, students are going to be ready to face the big world of communication and knowledge, in their professional life, where the appropriate use of English is undoubtedly important.

Presently, a high number of students have difficulties to communicate in the English language because they have some problems with the interference of first language, (Spanish in this case) on English language learning. In inspire of their need to learn it they are shy and do not feel confident to speak it in the classroom nor outside. Moreover, communication issues do not always occur due to the English level. Truly, students can know how to speak English without knowing how to communicate with it.

Further, English communication skill encompasses pronunciation, fluency, and accent. Pronunciation is a relevant dimension in the oral communicative process. Pronunciation should be didactically treated from the very beginning of the teaching-learning process of English especially for the students of L1 (Spanish), which responds to the didactic principle that language is primarily oral. According to Olivo (2016), one of the main reasons for students' bad pronunciation is the lack of influence of their mother tongue awareness (i.e. interference). Eventually, students need good pronunciation habits to comprehend what is spoken to them and to express oral messages.

English Communication skills are much more than pronunciation, fluency, and accent. It is what to say and how to say it. In today's classrooms, teachers are constantly required to apply different teaching methods, strategies to give students a better chance of developing their knowledge and achieving success. On the other hand, it is not mandatory for students to learn the required material; moreover, it is essential for students gain self-confidence towards their work, then seek for motivation to expand their learning.

However, it can be difficult for some students, who may struggle in traditional, lecture-based class styles. For some students, finding the motivation to complete homework or prepare for class can be a constant struggle, especially when every effort is met with a poor grade or frustration from teachers and parents. Therefore, teachers must become more and more creative when motivating students to learn in order to work effectively then get beneficial knowledge.

English as a second language is mandatory to teachers in Ecuador according to the Ministry of Education (2016) this process should be integral developing all skills in order to follow the agreement with the Common with the European Framework, to boost teachers' accurate and effective teaching.

In Esmeraldas the English teachers' training about the use of didactic material to improve their pronunciation is not enough. Hume (1997) considered vowel sounds as the complicated sounds to pronounce for EFL students because vowels tend to change their sounds according to their position into a word. Consequently, English teachers have to be trained with new methods, techniques, and strategies for helping learners to improve pronunciation and most learners can easily improve their communicative functions and skills if they have accurate English pronunciation.

This investigation examined the impact of some Spanish phonetic interferences, the importance of teaching pronunciation properly, the strategies used by some English teachers working with accuracy to avoid the Spanish interferences. Furthermore, it aims to reinforce similar previous studies in Esmeraldas-Ecuador.

The main objective of this investigation was to analyze English teachers' strategies to work with the phonetic interference of the Spanish language on English learning, taking in consideration three fundamental specific objectives likewise, to diagnose the most frequent phonetic errors that students make because of the interference of the Spanish language on English learning, to identify the English teachers' strategies to work with phonetic interference of the Spanish language on English learning, to determine the frequency in which teachers use native speakers audios to work with the phonetic interference.

Thus, the language learning plays an important role in the communication and education process, it is fundamental to know these definitions.

Phonetics

Phonetics is the scientific study of speech. It is the discovery of how speech sounds are produced, how they are used in spoken language, how we can record speech sounds with written symbols and how we hear and recognize different sounds, Roach (2009).

Phonology

According to the terms of Phonology, it has some definitions. Schwartz & Marton (2009) said, "Phonology is the communicative link that allows language speakers and listeners to encode and decode the intention, meaning, and the structure of language" (p. 4). Phonology is the study of sound structure in a language, which is other subject to study.

The structure of sounds is the phonology according to the previous definition. However, it has controversy with the importance to talk about pronunciation. (Odden, 2013) "An important feature of the structure of a sentence is how it is pronounced" (p.2). Pronunciation and phonology are related to providing a structure to sounds and words.

Interference

The learning process of a second language is a little difficult when the outlook or the channel in which this measure is developed does not help or does not grant using the spot language to practice. The appropriate teaching-learning process is based on studying and practicing the plan, it does not just retain grammar rules or pronunciations, that is, searching for help or going beyond normal learning through real-life situations, where everything can be put into practice, with the purpose of having a good fluency or development and thus not resorting to translation from Spanish to English in this case (Bone, 2019).

Thus, to achieve these situations, the contexts and the same environment play an important role, if the goal is to have a good domain in the target language. In addition, it is the explanation of some hypotheses

that make analysis to the acquisition of a second language. They must focus on students' needs. Further, when a child learns to talk, or speak his native language he had previous knowledge or notions inside the memory Saville-Troike (cited by Bone, 2019). "The beginning of the acquisition of a second language is centered on Universal Grammar and on the learning principles that are already submerged for the language which allows the human being instinctive learning" (p.6); which is based on the native language, implying that learning does not start from scratch but there is typical knowledge that will be transferred to L2.

Additionally, many authors have different criteria about the interference of a language in the process of learning a second language, and as well as, several studies have been carried out regarding the role played by the mother tongue in this process. Bone (2019) defining interference mentioned, "Its concept is not linguistics itself" (p.8). According to this study it is extracted from physics and after that be applied in other contexts.

Besides this concept produces something negative Weinreich (cited by Bone, 2019) that indicates "interference is like a deviation of the norms that exist in languages that are in contact" (p.8). That is, an influence changes the natural being of languages that are in coexistence. Meanwhile, terms such as transference or convergence have come to terms that have not been successful, due to the tradition or accentuation of the term interference. Undoubtedly, several authors mention the interference is not something negative. The influence exists between the (L1) within the learning process in the acquisition, of the (L2), "it is very important, and in certain cases, it serves or collaborates more when there are similarities between both languages" (Bone, 2019, p.8).

In fact, this interference can be negative when it does not allow the advancement of learning L2, but on the other hand, there are who considers it as positive in various cases it favors learning, this is this process is called a positive transfer, i.e. when there are similarities in the phonetic structure of these two languages.

Linguistic Interference

Phonetics is the main core in the linguistic system. People are able to construct and produce infinite and different sounds, which are absent in limited forms, or phonemes. There are many properties in each sound; therefore, they are essential and important in order to express different ideas during communication. The types of interference are interlanguage and intralanguage, and the two types are according to the form - implicit and explicit. Shusterman (2012) exposed that phonetics includes the speech sounds which has two main approaches, articulatory system and acoustics.

The first studies the articulatory system and the second deals with acoustic. Phonetics is related to the analysis of sounds. The acoustic phonetics is the center of this investigation, because of dealing with vowel and consonant sounds. The interference involves that the production of sounds requires a compound psychomotricity process which starts from muscular contraction. At first, chest muscles are contracted to produce the airflow that will go through the larynx, then that air goes up through the vocal tract to end in the mouth producing the sound. All that process needs articulators which are the reasons for the sound production (Roach, 1991, p.9).

Phonetic Interference

Interference attributes to the effect on one language contact, in this case, Spanish into English, in searching it is about describing the sound of speech and the model made. Surrounded by its different constructive functions the one that will be uppermost in the minds of most lectors is that of teaching and learning the pronunciation of a foreign language. Additionally, Bone (2019) mentioned that it is necessary to indicate that in interference there are different authors' point of view regarding whether there is

interference within the process of learning a second language, and as well as, several studies have been carried out regarding the role played by the mother tongue in this process.

The influence that exists between the (L1) within the learning process in the acquisition, of the (L2), it is very important, and in certain cases, it serves or collaborates more when there are close connections in the languages. Bone 2019 mentioned the interferences can be negative when it affects the correct pronunciation of the words and it causes misunderstanding in the communication. In addition, the interferences do not allow the learning progress of L2.

The linguistic system has different levels in which the sounds are involved. People are able to construct infinite and different sounds. The sounds produce different phonemes in order to express and communicate many ideas during communication. However, sometimes sounds make interference while they are pronounced. There are two types of interference interlanguage and intralanguage, and two types according to form implicit and explicit.

In addition, phonetics includes speech sounds which have two main approaches. Ladefoged (cited by Olivo, 2016) stated that the first one studies the articulatory system and the second deals with acoustic phonetics who is related to the analysis of sounds. The interference involves the production of sounds. They require a compound psychomotricity process which starts from muscular contraction. Previously, chest muscles are contracted to produce. Interference appears when learners make written or speaking mistakes from native language to a new language statement providing lack of habits of pronunciation.

Interference L1 to L2

While learners produce sounds the interferences appear in speech or written foreign language statements providing language habits from their mother tongue to the foreign language (Gonzalez, 2019). Therefore, the messages that people cannot be understood correctly. Thus, they avoid the rules or norms of no native language.

Native Audios

To learn English is not difficult this process should be flexible and convenient for teachers and students. You can use multimedia. Mayer (2001) defined it as the combination of various digital media types, such as text, image, sound, and video, into an integrated multi-sensory interactive application or presentation to convey a message or information to an audience.

These resources play an important role in the English teaching-learning process due to, they create an excellent environment between teachers and students, allow them to reinforce grammatical structure, to check phonetic errors, good pronunciation, to improve listening skill, to understand properly. Hence, English teachers must motivate students to use multimedia in classes.

Strategies

There are different strategies to work with the learner of a second language. Strategy inventory for language learning of L2 which measures is the self-reported frequency of certain based on language learning aptitude (Oxford 1996).

The Direct Method focused on pronunciation using intuition and imitation, learners have to follow a model that could be the teacher or a recording. In addition to this method, it follows the same strategies of Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach. The qualitative method is concerned with the opinions, experiences, and individual producing subjective data. Desuggestopedia method Lozanov, (1970) is a teaching method applied positive suggestion to learners of a foreign language. Occasionally students do not receive enough motivation to develop their skills in furtherance to improve English knowledge.

This lack of motivation probably makes students do not have the determination to speak or write in the target language because they do not want to make errors. Furthermore, they get frustrations to reminiscence the previous lesson, being to learn the new vocabulary. For this reason, teachers have to be innovative and apply an effective method on the teaching-learning process.

Methodological Strategies

The methodological strategies are important to develop the teaching-learning process. Herrera (2019) “It implies that we enter the subject in a more specific way, using more modern methods that guide us learning and teaching a new language” (p.9). The permanent changes of this process encourage teachers to search for new strategies to learn English. Furthermore, the strategies used by teachers need to be motivational for modern students, in order to catch their attention.

Presently, teachers applied many strategies to develop their classes. Zambrano in 2017 mentioned some beneficial strategies to work with the Spanish interference in the learning of English such as: interaction, personal work, cooperative learning, ludic strategies (games), cognitive strategies (feedback) and technological resources (radio, television, computer, cellphone, the Internet).

Teachers used the general review to correct phonetic errors, the students repeat the words several time to avoid mistakes and improve their knowledge. In addition, the students make sentences using these words then, teachers correct them individually in their classes with the main objective to correct the Spanish interferences.

Antecedents

The main part of the previous researchers noticed that the first language had interference in second language acquisition. For instance, Fatemi, Sobhani, and Abolhassan (2012) investigated in second language learners the differences in consonant clusters orally in the first and second languages, and pointed out that if the structures of first and second languages were different, learners have difficulties in L2 pronunciation because they oppose to unfamiliar phonological rules, therefore the learners make mistakes when they wanted to communicate.

In Bogota, Guzmán & Martinez (2013) detected phonetic interference from Spanish to English language production of phonemes /b/ /v/, /θ/ /t/, /ʒ/ /dʒ/, /tʃ/ /ʃ/. The research was applied on students of the major degree in modern languages at the Javeriana University. The learning and motivation method were used. These phonemes reveled patterns and issues in pronunciation. Moreover, it was found that, students with lower level of English present more interference in pronunciation. Nevertheless, some intermediate and high level students present interference due to the lack of knowledge about the phonemes.

In Esmeraldas, Olivo (2016) did a research about the main difficulties Spanish students have while pronouncing specific phonemes /t/ and /d/ she applied the technique of observation and an interview on students of the eight-level of the International Commerce studies at PUCESE. Her research demonstrated that phonological mistakes were located at the end of a word due to the influence of Spanish sounds in the English learners.

Soukaina (2017) presented a research based on mistakes. She investigated the Moroccan university students’ most frequent pronunciation errors related to segmental sounds. As a result, she classified them into categories and found a possible impact on other languages. In addition, she mentioned that teachers should require to their own intuition for solving problems and help EFL learners to overcome struggle.

Subsequent, Bone (2019) investigated the influence of Spanish on the pronunciation of English fricative phonemes /θ / /ʃ / /s / in students of Applied Linguistic from PUCESE. Analytical method and a survey were applied. As a result, she got answer mostly correctly and some errors coincidence, even if the learners were in their last year of study.

Method

This study was developed at Pontificia Catholic University in 2020. The population and sample consisted of 36 teachers from different schools and universities in Esmeraldas, Ecuador. Who were studying at the Master's program of Pedagogy in English due to they were working with students of different levels of education.

This research was an explorative-qualitative and quantitative one, because it had determined the interference of L1 on L2 in the teaching-learning process. In addition, it was quantitative because it detected the most frequency number of Spanish phonetics' errors and the strategies used by teachers to work with this interference in the learning of English, in order to improve speaking skills and get a better level of English.

The constant practice of the correct pronunciation of the sounds and words might help the English teacher to work with Spanish phonetic interference in the learning of English. The dependent variable was Strategies to work with the phonetic and the independent variable was Interference. The methods applied for this investigation were the analysis and synthesis, in furtherance to analyze the interference of L1 and L2 and strategies to work with the interference. Moreover, the hermeneutic method was used; the information was compiled in the framework due to the appropriate and effective way to reinforce the results.

A virtual survey was applied as a technique with the purpose to determine which the most frequently Spanish phonetic errors are made by students and the strategies that teachers have used to work with the interference of L1 in L2 in learning to improve the students' knowledge. Moreover, English Teachers were provided with a link on a web allowing them to respond the survey. A questionnaire with nine open-ended and closed-ended questions formed the survey. The instrument developed according to the different techniques was used. This document was manipulated to identify the phonetic interferences of L1 Spanish in the L2.

Different techniques were applied to collected data. Then they were analyzed and included to the correspondent instruments which were used to compile evidence. Those results were current in a narrative procedure and adopting summary tables with the most pertinent report. Besides to process the information Microsoft Excel program was applied.

Results

The following figures reveal the results of this investigation. Regarding the first objective, sound mistakes have been identified as the learners' main speech difficulties and it is linked to the linguistic context in detail while the sentence formation process. Teachers said that their students had Spanish phonetic interference in TH/θ/ sound 97.2%, in S/s/ sound 55.5%, A/æ/ sound 44.4%. Also, there were other difficulties in some sounds caused by Spanish interference while students are learning English.

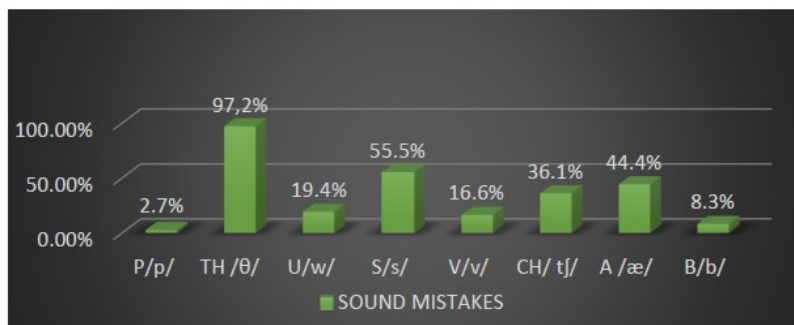


Figure 1: Students' mistakes making sounds. Source: Survey applied to English Teachers.

Regarding the second specific objective, teachers' strategies to correct the interference the analysis of this question revealed, all English teachers apply strategies in the teaching-learning process. Figure 2 showed 52% correct the students in a general way. Also, 36% listen and repeat the word several times, as a strategy to develop speaking skills. Even though there were other strategies, they have been used by teachers during the teaching-learning English process.



Figure 2: Teachers' strategies to correct the interference. Source: Survey applied to English Teachers.

Answering to the third specific objective, the frequency with which native English speakers' audios are used while students learn English as a foreign language. Teachers mentioned that 53% usually used them in the English classes. In addition, 28% of them applied this kind of resource in order to develop their students' skills during classes. Even a few teachers said they always employed it.

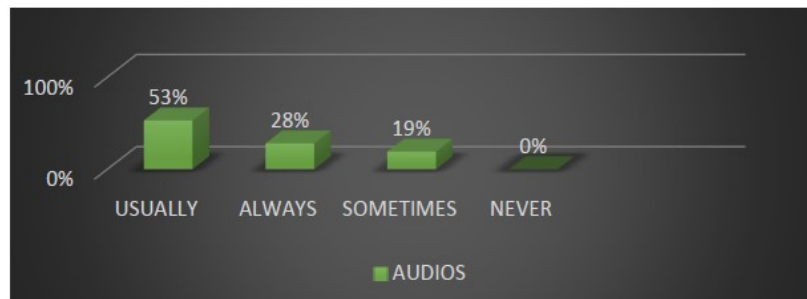


Figure 3: How often use English native speakers' audios? Source: Survey applied to English teachers.

Discussion

Through this investigation it was possible to analyze the strategies English teachers used to work with the phonetic interferences of the Spanish language in learning English. To accomplish this, the most frequent phonetic errors made by students due to the interference of the Spanish language in learning English were diagnosed to work with the phonetic interference of the Spanish language on English learning were identified, and the frequency in which teachers use native speaker audios to work with the phonetic interference was determined.

According to the study done by Fatemi, Sobhani, & Abolhassan (2012), there are factors that play an important role in the acquisition of a second language, for instance, similarities and differences between both languages. Their conclusions have some coincidences with the results of this investigation there is a comparison in the necessity of developing phonological strategies by focusing on an accurate pronunciation of sounds in a comprehensible way to have a better communication.

Guzman & Martínez (2013) provided beneficial strategies in their research about the Spanish phonetic interference in the production of some specific English phonemes in order to help students to improve the English speaking skill by avoiding Spanish interference. Their studies showed that students who had lower level of English presented more interference in the pronunciation which coincides with the result of this study. In fact, the oral errors in a speech were made while students were learning English.

In Esmeraldas, Olivo (2016) developed a descriptive research on the influence of Spanish in the production of the English phonemes /t/ and /d/ where the problems of an unreliable pronunciation are exposed, the difficulty is located at the final position in the word. Consequently, there are correlations with this investigation, where the phonological struggles on the pronunciation of vowels and consonants were identified learners who showed speech difficulties in the linguistic context sounds. Therefore, there is an interference of Spanish in the English language.

In a Moroccan University, Soukaina (2017) made a research about pronunciation errors and revealed that pronunciation gave a significant effect to the production and reception of speech, and the possible impact on other languages areas. Alternatively, in this investigation, the University of Morocco, found some possible strategies to avoid the interference of L1 to L2 for instance, made corrections in group, listen to conversations and repeat the words, make sentences with phonemes, which made interference in order to improve English. In addition, it has close relationship with this research as they both look for strategies to improve English.

In furtherance, Bone (2019) revealed results in her investigation about the Analysis of the influence of Spanish on the pronunciation of English fricative phonemes / θ / / ʃ / / s / applied in some university students of Esmeraldas, Ecuador. The result obtained in this study showed coincidence with this research because these phonemes do not exist in Spanish language, as a result, they make influence when speakers need to use them in oral speech because they did not know how they had pronounced. Even if the students are in a high English level.

Conclusions

This research was done to demonstrate the most frequent phonetic errors that students made due to the interferences of Spanish language on the English learning process. They are TH/θ/, S/s/, A/æ/ sounds. They were identified as the most frequent phonetic errors made by students while they are learning English.

Likewise, English teachers' strategies are to work with phonetic interference of the Spanish on English learning. They use as strategies to correct students in a general way, to listen and repeat the words several times to develop students' speaking skill. Even, teachers motivate their students to make sentences using the words that make interferences to improve their English level.

In addition, the English teachers use native speaker audios to work with the interference of the Spanish language on English learning usually in their classes because they want that students avoid the interferences. The Spanish interference makes a problem on no native English speakers in the English learning process. However, when the interferences have been identified, the English teachers can use techniques and strategies to work in their classes helping to develop pronunciation, comprehension, or speaking English with the main objective to reach total learning.

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Author's Bio-Note

Mario Marlon Montes Montaña is a Teacher of English at La Providencia school, Esmeraldas, Ecuador. His research interests deal with strategies to work with the phonetic interference of Spanish language on English language learning in students of Esmeraldas city.