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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NEGATIVE TRANSFER IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH CONSONANTS.

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Abstract

We, Indians are not the native speakers of English language. In India most of the social groups have their own mother tongue belonging to one family, while the second language. English belongs to an entirely different family-the Indo European family. Malayalam , belonging to the Dravidian group of languages has vast dissimilarities with English. Any use of a language begins with its spoken sounds. There will be occasions when the child easily and conveniently assumes that a particular sound of English is identical with a similar sound in his mother tongue and that results in the negative transfer. In most of the classrooms, phonetics or the study of speech sounds is reduced to a mental activity though the subject is considered to be physical. The total neglect of one's mother tongue will result in the faulty pronunciation of words. The main reason behind this problem is giving little importance to the place and manner of articulation of the sounds. My paper investigates the place and manner of articulation of the sounds and the mother tongue interference.

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Introduction:-

Every language has its own specific structure. A child acquires his mother tongue naturally in the process of growing up. For the acquisition of second language the case is quite different. First language acquisition and foreign language learning differ fundamentally in those cases where the foreign language is learnt later than the mother tongue and on the basis of the full mastery of that mother tongue.

India is a multilingual country and each linguistic community has some peculiar problems of its own. We, Indians are not the native speakers of English language. In India most of the social groups have their own mother tongue belonging to one family, while the second language English belongs to an entirely different family-the Indo European family. Malayalam , belonging to the Dravidian group of languages has vast dissimilarities with English. Any use of a language begins with its spoken sounds. According to mother tongue interference theory similarities between the mother tongue and the second language facilitate the second language acquisition and if the learning of one's mother tongue interferes with the learning of second language, it results in the negative transfer. For example, the way of learning Malayalam [phonetic language] in which we write as we pronounce and vice versa will interfere with the pronunciation and spelling of English which is an unphonetic language. There will be occasions when the child easily and conveniently assumes that a particular sound of English is identical with a similar sound in his mother-tongue.

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Among the plosives RP and Malayalam stops there exists similarities and dissimilarities. The voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ and voiced /b/ shows similarity with the voiceless and the voiced bilabial plosive of Malayalam. The initial consonants in the words pa:l (milk), pa:dam (foot), balam (strength), bandhu (relative) are articulated in the same way as /pa:m (palm) /pa:k/ (park) /bˈlu:n/ (balloon). The aspirated plosives are phonemes in Malayalam. So there are aspirated phonemes like /ph/, /gh/, /ch/, /kh/ occur in phalam (fruit), grantham (book), chaya (reflection), mekham. In English aspirated varieties are treated as allophones. So [ph][th][kh] are allophones of /p/ /t/ /k/. /t/ and /d/ are alveolar in English that is, the sounds made with the tongue touching between the top front teeth and the hard palate. The retroflex variety of /t/ and /d/ in Malayalam results in the prolonged pronunciation of double consonants in 'mutton', 'hidden', ridden etc. Since in most Indian languages there exists a one-to-one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation, the Indians tend to pronounce the words like upper, summer, running, pulley with a prolonged /pp/, /mm/, /ll/, /nn/.

Of the affricates, Malayalam has no affricate sounds. The nearest equivalents to post-alveolar RP are the palatal stops /ç/ and /j/. The place of articulation of /tʃ/ /dʒ/ in /neitʃ/, /dzʒm/ in Malayalam are made with the tongue close to the hard palate and they are stop consonants /ç/ as in 'chayam' (colour) and /j/ jathi (nutmeg).

In RP, nasals are articulated between the top front teeth and the hard palate. In Malayalam, the word nakshtram (star) is made with the tongue touching the teeth ridges. The presence of dental nasals, retroflex nasals and palatal nasals interferes during the articulation of alveolar 'n'. So in the pronunciation of words like 'Sunday', 'none', 'cotton', the tendency to use retroflex nasal is quite common.

In English and Malayalam /l/ is a voiced sound and occurs initially, medially and finally. /l/ in both languages exhibits partial similarity. The RP /l/ has a retroflex quality in Malayalam. For example, in the words 'fly' & 'lull', /l/ is articulated by curling the tongue. The RP labio-dental fricative /v/ is a labio-dental frictionless continuant. The RP /w/ is absent in Malayalam and is articulated like the labio-dental /v/. The place of articulation of words 'wet' & 'vet' is labio-dental instead of the lip rounding quality of English semi vowel /w/.

The important thing about the articulation of /r/ is that the tip of the tongue approaches the alveolar area in approximately the way it would for a /t/ or /d/ but never actually makes contact with any part of the roof of the mouth. In Malayalam, there is a tongue-palate contact. The tongue is usually slightly curled backward with the tip raised. The manner of articulation is also different. It's usual for the lips to be slightly rounded. If the lip rounding is too strong, the consonant will sound too much like /w/. So in Malayalam, /r/ is a flap.

Among the nine fricative consonants /s/, /h/ have analogues in Malayalam. The voiceless alveolar in RP shows partial similarity in both languages. In Malayalam, /s/ is denti-alveolar. The fricative /h/ exhibits partial similarity. In Malayalam, /h/ is a velar fricative, while in RP, it is glottal. In English /h/ occurs in syllable initial position before a vowel. In Malayalam, it can occur initially and medially. Malayalam has dental plosives like /t/ and /d/, while RP has /ç/, /ʒ/ dental fricatives. The fricatives like /ʒ/, /ʒ/ are absent in Malayalam. It is often replaced by voiceless fricative /s/. For example, in the pronunciation of words, 'zoo', 'zone', the /s/ sound is heard usually.

In most of the classrooms, phonetics, the study of speech sounds, is reduced to a mental activity though the subject is considered to be physical. The total neglect of the place and manner of articulation of the sound will result in the faulty pronunciation of words. The main reason behind this problem is giving little importance to relate the articulation with one's mother tongue.

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