An Analysis of Pronunciation Error Committed by Sinhala Speaking Learners of French

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Abstract *-The present research analyzes the pronunciation errors made by Sinhala speaking learners of French. The study is based on the assumption that the pronunciation errors were systematic and they reflect the interference of the learners' native language. The fundamental research question of this project is to study to what extent L1 of the speaker influences the acquisition of French in terms of acquisition of pronunciation. The thirty advanced participants were recruited using the random sampling method. By the time of the study, the subjects were studying French as a foreign language for their Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. The participants were from a homogenous linguistics background. All participants speak the same native language (Sinhala) and they had completed their secondary education in Sinhala medium during which they had also learnt French as a foreign language. The subjects were asked to read a list of words and sentences and the recording was conducted individually in a quiet classroom using a battery operated audio tape recorder and a 120-minute blank cassettes. Each recording approximately took fifteen minutes. Before the recording process commenced, the subjects were requested to familiarize themselves with the words and sentences by reading them several times. Each subject was required to read at a normal speed. After the completion of recording, the recordings were replayed to identify common errors which were immediately transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet. Results demonstrate that Sinhala speaking learners face problems with French nasal vowels ($\tilde{\varepsilon}$, $\tilde{oe}$, $\tilde{a}$, $\tilde{ɔ}$) and French initial consonants clusters (tʀ, pʀ, kʀ, gʀ, sk, ps, mn, kz, dz, dʒ and vk) and medial clusters. The learners also exhibit errors which occur because of their second language (English) interference.*

Keywords*: error analysis, pronunciation difficulties, pronunciation errors*

I.   INTRODUCTION

The present research analyzes the pronunciation errors made by Sinhala speaking learners of French. Globalization, demographic trends and developing economy have enlarged the role of foreign and second languages in Sri Lanka. In this context, French language has become one of the most popular foreign languages in the island.

French and Sinhala belong to the Indo-European family thus they expect to show a closer affinity than languages belong to different families but lexical, grammatical, phonological and morphological dissimilarities in French and Sinhala render learning process difficult for Sri Lankan learners.The fundamental research question of this project is to study to what extent L1 of the speaker influences the acquisition of French in terms of acquisition of pronunciation.

II.   METHODOLOGY

The thirty advanced participants were recruited using the random sampling method. By the time of the study, the subjects were studying French as a foreign language for their Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

All participants speak the same native language (Sinhala) and they had completed their secondary education in Sinhala medium during which they had also learnt French as a foreign language. The subjects were asked to read a list of words and sentences and the recording was conducted individually in a quiet classroom using a battery operated audio tape recorder and a 120-minute blank cassettes. Each recording approximately took fifteen minutes. Before the recording process commenced, the subjects were requested to familiarize themselves with the words and sentences by reading them several times. Each subject was required to read at a normal speed. After the completion of recording, the recordings were replayed to identify common errors which were immediately transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet.

III. RESULTS

A. Vowels
1) /i/
When phoneme /i/ is in the initial position of a word and followed by an oral consonant, learners substituted /i/ with /I:/.
Example:

/izole/ /i:zole/ 'isolated'
When phoneme /i/ is preceded by phoneme /y/, the glide /ɥi/ occurs in French. Learners substituted /ɥi/ by phonemes /u/.

Examples:
/apɥi / /apui/ 'support'
When phoneme /i/ is represented by grapheme /ee/ learners substituted /i/ with /i:/.

Example:
/wikɛnd/ /wi:kɛnd/ 'under hypnosis'

2) /e/
When graphemes /ai/ and /aie/ are in the initial or medial position of a word, vowel /e/ occurs in French(Dupré2005). Learners substituted phoneme /e/ with /i:/.

Example:
/ene/ /aine/ 'eldest'
When vowel /e/ is in the initial position of a word, the latter phonemeis substituted by /i/.

Example:
/ekɔ̃l/ /i:kɔ̃l/ 'school'
When grapheme/hai/ is in the medial position of a word, vowel /e/ occurs in French words(Fontaine 1995:65). Learners substituted the latter phoneme with /ai/.

Example:
/swete/ /swaite/ 'wish'
When grapheme /ei/ is in the medial and initial position of a word, phoneme /e/ ensues in French(Fontaine 1995:86). Learners substituted the later with /i:/ or /e:/.

Example:
/neʒe/ /ne:ʒe/ 'snow'

It was also noted that learners occasionally substituted /e/ with /ɛ/.

Example:
/meʀci/ /mɛʀci/ 'to neigh'

3) /ɛ/
Phoneme /ɛ/ is represented by graphemes /ai/, /ait/, /aix/ and /haie/ (Fouché1959:89). Learners substituted the latter phoneme with /ai/.

Examples:
/vʀɛ/ /vʀai/ 'true'
Phoneme /ɛ/ in the initial position of wordswassubstituted with /i/.

Example:
/ɛspɛs/ /ispɛs/ 'species'

4) /ɑ/

When phoneme /a/ is represented by letter e, learners substituted the latter phoneme with /e/.

Example:
/fam/ /fem/ 'women'

5) /ɑ/
Learners systematically substituted /ɑ/ with /a/ which is now accepted in standard French, further such substitution do not change pronunciation drastically.

6) /ɔ/
Substitution of /ɔ/ with /o/ was the most common mistake among learners. This error was observed when /ɔ/ is represented by grapheme /au/.

Examples:
/sɔt/ /sot/ 'jumps'
When phoneme /ɔ/ is represented by grapheme/oo/, it was substituted with /o/.

Example:
/alɔl/ /alol/ 'alcohol'

7) /o/
Phoneme /o/ is common to both Sinhala and French yet it is mispronounced by some learners when it is represented by graphemes/au/. It was substituted with phoneme /ɔ/.

Example:
/ob/ /ɔ:b/ 'dawn'
5.6.1.8 /u/
When grapheme/ou/ occurs in initial, medial or final position of a word, phoneme /u/ occurs in French (Fouché1959).Learners substitute the latter phoneme with /o/.

Example:
/sule/ /sole/ 'drunk'

9) /y/
Phoneme/y/ wassubstituted with /u/

Examples:
/hyt/ /hut/ 'hut'
/ty/ /tu/ 'you'

10) /ø/
When phoneme /ø/ occurs in the final position of a word, it was systematically substituted with /o/.

Example:
/vøf/ /vof/ 'widowed'
11) /œ/
phoneme/œ/ was substitutedwith**/ɛ/.**
Example:

/œʀ/   /ɛʀ/   'hour'

When phoneme /œ/ is represented by graphemes/eu/, and /eue/learners substituted the latter phoneme with /œ/and/o/.

Examples:

/fø/   /fo/   'fire'

B. Nasal vowels

Most common error among leaners of all level was that they filed to distinguish the difference between French nasal vowels and their oral counterparts.

1) /ɛ̃/

When /ɛ̃/ is in the initial position of a world, learners substitute /ɛ̃/ by /ɛ/.

Example:

/ɛ̃mpʀime/   / ɛmpʀime /   'print'

2) /ɑ̃/

When phoneme /ɑ̃/ occurs in the initial position of a word, it was often substituted by phoneme /a/ or /æ/.

Examples:

/ɑ̃bigy/   /ɑbigy/   'ambiguous'
            /æbigy/

3) /ɔ̃/

Phoneme/ɔ̃/ was replaced with /ɔ/.

Examples:

/dɔ̃ k/   /dɔk/   'so'

4) /œ̃/

When grapheme /un/ is in the initial or medial position and followed by a consonant, nasalized vowel /œ̃/ occurs in French (Jean-Pierre2001). Learners substituted/œ̃/ with /ʌn/.

Examples:

/lœ̃di/   /lœdi/   'Monday'

C) Consonants

1) Leaners did not encounter prominent difficulties when pronouncing following phonemes: /b/, /g/, /v/, /l/, /m/ /n/ and/ŋ/

2) /p/

Leaners encountered difficulties when /p/is represented by grapheme /bt/ and /d/

Example:

/syptil/   /sybtil/   'subtle'

3) /t/

A few numberlearners substituted /t/ with [ʈ].

Example:

/kɔ̃te/   /kɔ̃ʈe/   'happy'

4) /k/

Whenconsonant /k/ is presented by grapheme /ch/, it was replaced/c/

Example:

/klɔʀ/   /clɔʀ/   'chlorine'

5) /g/

Leaners did not encounter significant errors related consonant /g/

6) /f/

One of themost salient mistake has been the substitution of /f/ with /p/.

Examples:

/fʀɑ̃se/   /pʀɑ̃se/   'French'

7) /ʃ/

Another prominent mistake was the confusion between /s/ and /ʃ/.

8)./z/

When phoneme /z/ is represented by graphemes /s/, learners substituted /z/ with /s/

Example:

/ʀoz/   /ʀos/   'pink'

9) /ʒ/

It was perceived that the most salient error was the confusion between phonemes /ʒ/ and/ʃ/.

Example:

/ʒwe/   /ʃwe/   'play'

IV.   DISCUSSION

Vowel /a/ appeared to be the easiest phoneme whereas significant amount of errors were encountered pertaining to all oral vowels and nasal vowels.

/ɔ/ was systematically replaced by /o/ whereas /y/ was substituted by /u/. Learners failed to distinguish the differences between /i/ and /y/, /y/ and /u/, /ɔ/ and /o/, /œ/ and /ɛ/ /ø/ and /œ/ and /œ/ and/ɔ/. Regardless of the proficiency level, all learners encountered difficulties with regards totripthongs in French; /eje/,/ɛjɑ/, /ĵɛj/, /wajɛ/, /wajɛĵ and/ɥije/.

Learners did not encounter difficulties when articulating following phonemes: /b/, /g/, /v/, /l/, /m/ /n/ and/ŋ/ as they exist in both languages.It was revealed that learners failed to identify the differences between /s/ and /z/, /ʃ/ and /s/ and /ʃ / and /ʒ/. Difficulties were noted related to

mute letter in the final and medial position of words. Letter h was articulated especially when it is at the initial position of a word and e was also pronounced when it is placed at the end of words. Some learners also showed problems when s is used as the plural marker. Errors were also observed among word initial clusters such as tʀ, pʀ, kʀ, gʀ, sk, ps, mn, kz, dz, dʒ and vk whereas following medial cluster were challenging for basic and independent level learners. bʀ, bd, bv, bz, bʒ,dʀ, dv, dz, dʒ, fl, fʀ, ft, gʀ, gz, , kʀ, if, iʀ, ls, lt, lʃ, pʀ, ps, ʀd, ʀg, ʀk, ʀl, ʀm, ʀn, ʀp, ʀʀ, ʀs, ʀs, ʀt, ʀʒ,ʀʃ, sf, sl, sʀ, st, sʃ, tb, tl, tʀ, sʃ , tb, tʃ, vm, vv, vt, zb, zm, zk, ʃl, ʃʀ,ʃt, ʃm, ʃv, ʒk, ʒm, ʒʀ,ʒs and ʒt.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the nature of common errors that appear in Sinhala speaking learners studying French as a foreign language. This study ignores non-linguistic factors such as physiology, neurology, psychology, and personality, attitude of the learner and age which could influence language learning. Nevertheless Contrastive Analysis offers instructive information for error analysis (Robert, P. (1999). An acoustic analysis could have been prepared in order to determine the realization of French phonemes by learners. An acoustic analysis could have provided accurate distinction between shared phonemes of Sinhala and French. For example, this study identified that the place of articulation of phoneme /i/ in French and Sinhala is different. An acoustic analysis would have helped to determine the importance of such distinctions. The number of subjects selected to this research could have been larger and learners could have been recruited from different linguistic backgrounds, as a result, in this research, a complete and thorough generalization of the finding to all Sri Lankan learners would be slightly problematic. Learners were recorded in a relaxed environment with their consent but recording process posed inevitable stress as they were really attentive to make correct pronunciation. Error analysis shows clearly that language acquisition of learners is influenced by both first language and second language interferences. Sinhala language is influencing the language acquisition of learners of all level. Surprisingly, errors were observed among advanced level learners pertaining to unshared oral vowels; y, ø and œ and all nasal vowels.. Errors were also occurred due to foreign phonemes which have been incorrectly substituted for a long period of time. These errors have been stored in learners' interlanguage as fossilized errors. Error analysis demonstrates that similarities between native language and target language do not always facilitate language acquisition. /i/ exists in both French and Sinhala but it was substituted by ai, iː, y and u whereas /e/ was replaced by eː, ai, i, ai, a, aː,i: and

e. Intralingual were also observed but minimal. The influence of English on French language acquisition cannot be overlooked hence error analysis demonstrated that some learners substituted French phonemes with phonemes which occur in Sinhala. This study rejects the popular belief that acquisition of correct pronunciation is difficult for Sinhala speaking learners purely because of French phonemes. The author has shown that similar phonemes also make learning difficult. The author believes that the most salient issue for learners is the complex nature of graphemes. /e/ can be represented by 41 different graphemes whereas 56 different graphemes represent phoneme ε. Despite its limitation, it is hoped that this research will help French language teachers to understand the phonological acquisition of Sinhala speaking leaners and the findings will help both teachers and learners to be aware of the interference of different sound systems on French pronunciation. Very few reach have been done on Sri Lankan learner of French therefore the researcher encourages similar studies in this line.

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