Common Pronunciation Mistakes in English for Students From South-East Asia Influenced by Their First Foreign Language

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Abstract

The opportunity to study English language in the country of its origin is a privilege not available to everyone. Thus many students choose to learn English in a non-native environment alongside another foreign language. This article is a part of a big research dedicated to the process of adaptation of the students from the countries of South-East Asia to a new educational environment and different cultures. The article represents the preliminary results of the study on major difficulties in mastering the pronunciation of English sounds due to the process of interference from mother's tongue and the first foreign language, in our case – Russian. By conducting our research for more than 3 years and being able to interview 356 students from theSouth-Eastern countries, we have come to several conclusions, which are represented in our article. According to our observation we suggest some practical advice that can help overcoming interference in teaching English as a second language to these kinds of students.

Keywords: TESOL, Pronunciation, Interference, Foreign Students, Teaching Methods

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1. Introduction

Intelligible pronunciation plays a huge role in successful communication. As a global language, English has evolved into a few native varieties and many other nonnative ones, across the globe. The nonnative English speaking people use English as a Lingua Franca, for international business, education and communication, so the English language has very many cross-cultural varieties where the non-native speaker varieties penetrate in all aspects of the language. However, nonnative English pronunciations are more widespread and mostly considered as incorrect in comparison to Standard English or pronunciations of native English speakers. Nonnative English pronunciation errors can be found in all of the major elements of English phonology, i.e. phonemes, syllables, word stress, rhythm and intonation.

The purpose of the paper is to represent the major difficulties in mastering the pronunciation of English sounds due to the processes of positive transference and interference from mother's tongue (L1) combining with the same processes of the first foreign language (L2) and their joint influence on the second foreign language (L3). The paper illustrates segmental (consonants and vowels) errors in English pronunciation of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Russian students at the time of studying English language, and the pronunciational errors of Chinese, Vietnamese students in the process of acquiring Russian language, in order to compare and contrast the results and find the pattern of the influence of the combination L1 + L2 on L3.

The research demonstrates that the prevailing influential element of the pronunciational errors is hidden in the combination of L1+L2 interaction, and not just L2: which leads us to the different methods of teaching.

2. Review Literature

«English pronunciation has various components such as sounds, stress, and variation in pitch, and the learner needs to understand the function of these as well as their form. Once learners are aware that English words have a stress pattern, that words can be pronounced in slightly different ways, that the pitch of the voice can be used to convey meaning, then they will know what to pay attention to and can build upon this basic awareness. Learners also need to develop a concern for pronunciation. They must recognize that poor, unintelligible speech will make their attempts at conversing frustrating and unpleasant both for themselves and for their listeners.» by Joanne Kenworthy.

The theoretical basis of the research was made up the works by: G. Kelly, P. Roach, M. Hewings, D.D. Crystal, J. Goodwin, P. Ashby, T. Jones, J.D. O'Conner and M. Celce-Murcia.

In the work "English Phonetics and Phonology," P. Roach argues that the improvement of the phonetic side of speech is not possible only through a mechanical work, in case to achieve the perfect sound of the vowels and consonants but it is also an understandable to the others pronunciation is needed. At the same side M. Hewings gives a number of the most common mistakes that should be paid attention to. Our research took into account the errors in the components of the phonetic system listed blow that can lead to misunderstanding and disruption of the act of oral communication, as listed below:

1. The pronunciation of consonants, as they are significant in the semantic definition of the word.

2. The pronunciation of the consonant clusters, as the students of different mother tongues tend either to add an additional sound or miss existing one.

3. The right pronunciation of vowels longitude, as long vowel is meaningful for the phonetic system of the English language, and therefore requires special attention.

4. The verbal stress, as according to M. Hewings is often wrongly chosen stressed syllable that causes difficulties in understanding the meaning of the statement.

5. The phrasal stress, as it is also can lead to misunderstanding between communication.

All the authors, mentioned above, are concerned about the role of pronunciation in educational process. Furthermore, they consider it necessary to pay as much attention to the phonetic aspect of language learning as possible, using communicative approach as a good basis for working out and an effective way to deal with the correction of pronunciational mistakes.

The researchers agree that some of the main difficulties in learning English as s foreign language are the discrepancy between the written and sound design of the words, the variety of sound variations that one letter can convey. In addition, the authors note the need to take into account the influence of the native language, the ability of students to adapt and the ability of the teacher to be flexible.

It should also be noted that among Russian scientists and researchers, the most popular point of view is that L3 is totally influenced by L2, and the role of L1 in this process is completely denied (Bagramova N.V., Lapidus B.A.). They insist that positive transfer learning skills of the first foreign language (L2) effectively impacts building on skills and capabilities when teaching L3. Point of reference of theoretical and practical researches of intensification of bilingual teaching is a relatively comparative method. With a deep analysis and adequate comprehension of bilingual teaching process one can speak of solving a complex of tasks connected with learning two foreign languages and of forming speech pattern and lingua-cultural content.

In this article, we do not want to argue with any of the foregoing ideas, we just feel the need to introduce the possibility of the combinational influence of L1 and L2 on the second foreign language.

3. The context and settings of the study

The uniqueness of the research lies in its background. The research was conducted in one of the leading pedagogical universities of St. Petersburg (Russia), on two different departments: Department of Russian as a Foreign Language and Department of Foreign Languages. This led to the peculiar composition of the educational groups our research was carried on. During a three-year period, every year, 13 groups of the students were examined, where 11 groups were from RFL faculty and consisted only of the students from the South-East Asia and 2 groups from FL faculty where all the students were Russian. All in all, it allowed us to study 356 people, which gave a plausible representative sample.

It is important to mention that the educational process's language at the University is Russian and for the students from RFL department, Russian is L2. All lectures, seminars, and

conferences are conducted in Russian. English language is L2 for the students of Foreign Language Department, while for the students from RFL department it is L3. The percentage of English language in the whole process of education reaches a maximum of 40%.

It is not less important to mention that there are no Russian students among the students of RFL department. The students in that department come from different countries of South-East and South Asia. The biggest group is Chinese.

Sample - table No.1 «The national component of the groups»

nationalities	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Chinese	45%	60%	75%	50%	80%
Vietnamese	25%	40%	10%	25%	-
Thais	15%	-	7%	25%	-
Korean	15%	-	13%	-	20%

As seen from the table above, the classroom situation was aggravated by cultural heterogeneity. It is also worth mentioning that the education system in Russia is different for all the students who have come to study. We are not talking about the advantages or disadvantages of one system of education over another; we are simply trying to state the conditions we had to deal with to get better results. From our side, we had theoretical and practical knowledge of the cultural differences of our students and their different learning styles.

In reference to this above context, we have formulated the research question as follows:

How significant is the influence of L1 and L2 combination in the area of pronunciation on L3 in a non-linguistic environment?

The design of this study was descriptive-qualitative. Also, a comparative-and-contrast data analysis was used. The research population was 356 students from thirteen groups during three subsequent years who were studying in the third year of the Bachelor's program at the Russian as a Foreign Language department and department of Foreign Languages of St. Petersburg State Pedagogical University, Russia. The data was collected through observation, individual questionnaires, video essays, and audio recordings. The video and audio recordings were carried out as students practiced in-classroom English speaking exercises and as homework. This data collection was taken over three years from September 2019 to December 2022. The researcher observed, noted, and recorded precisely the common pronunciational errors of the students and analyzed the changes depending on their L1 and L2. The final results after comparison and contract allowed us to come to the conclusion on the main question of the research.

All the data is represented in the several tables further in the "Discussion & Results" section of this article.

4. Discussion & Results

Table 1: influences on L2 (where L2 is English)

Main "difficult" sounds	Russian	Chinese	Vietnamese
vowels			
[æ]	doesn't exist in Russian - replaced with [e]	doesn't exist in Chinese - replaced with [a]/[ei]	doesn't exist in Vietnamese - replaced with [e]
[əʊ] – [ʊ]	pronounce as a single Russian [o]	-	Replaced with [u]
[i]/[i:] [u:]/[u]	Length of the vowel isn't important in Russian [i]	no distinction between short and long vowels [i]	mispronounce long vowel sounds as short vowel [i]
[ɒ]	Replaced with [ʌ]	doesn't occur in Chinese, use an open but Unrounded sound	Replaced with [ɔ:]
[ou]	-	turn the short [ɔ] into a long [ɔ:]	-
Consonants/ consonant clusters			
[l]	raise their tongue at the back of the mouth	difficult to produce the difference between [l] and [r], omit or replaced with the consonant nearby	does not have the equivalent sounds for [l] and [r], commonly mistaken for [n]
[r]	often trill the tongue	doesn't exist in Chinese, replaced with [n] or [l]	does not have the equivalent sounds for [l] and [r], commonly mistaken for [z]
[w]	doesn't contain the clear distinction between [w] –[v] – replaced with [v]/[f]	replaced with [v]/[f]	replaced with [v]/[f]
[θ]	replaced with [s]	replaced with [s]	consonants probably do not exist in Vietnamese, therefore people are not familiar with pronouncing these sounds like [θ], [ð], [z], [f]; [θ] – replaced with [t]
[ð]	replaced with [z]	replaced with [z]/[d]	consonants probably do not exist in Vietnamese, therefore people are not familiar with pronouncing these sounds like [θ], [ð], [z], [f]; [ð]- replaced with [d]
[h]	produce this sound in the mouth as [x]	-	-
-ng	Very hard [g] at the end of the word	-	[g] is heard at the end of the words and in the middle of the words
on/un (in the middle of the word)	-	tend to add an extra *g* at the end. So Monday becomes "Mongday"	-
Weak syllables: schwa [ə]	pronounce the vowel as it's written, making it too strong	-	-

As it is seen from the table above, there are several common mistakes in pronunciation among all three types of learners. Moreover, it is necessary to admit that within the table, we did not present all possible options, since the main goal was to show the most difficult sounds to pronounce among the speakers of these languages. Although, we would like to specify a few more errors:

1. Muting voiced consonants at word ending. In Russian, consonants at the end of words are typically voiceless and non-sonorous. In English, however, consonants at the end of words are voiced. This small difference can completely change the meaning of a word. For example, "bad" (adjective) becomes "bat" (noun), "cab" - "cap", "dog" - "dock", and so on. Muting voiced consonants does not change the meaning of the word in all cases, however, it is most common error for Russian native-speaking students.

2. Also Russian language can be relatively flat in tone with sudden inflections in pitch. It can be easy for speakers to misplace the primary stress in words on the wrong syllable. This can make spoken language harder to understand.

3. Chinese students tend to stress the last sound of a word and produce an extra syllable. For example, "and" becomes "an-duh".

4. Keeping in mind that in Chinese language there are a lot of different dialects, which are typically classified into several groups (Mandarin, Wu, Min, Xiang, Gan, Hakka, and Yue) there are a lot of sounds that do not exist in them. For example: "b" as in "bag"; "d" as in "dog"; "g" as in "go"; "v" as in "very"; "z" as in "bees"; "sh" as in "show"; "j" as in "badge"; soft "j" as in "usually"; "r" as in "row"; "ch" as in "chew"; "sh" as in "shine"; voiced "th" as in "there"; voiceless "th" as in "both".

5. Many Vietnamese students tend to speak English without stress at all, because many Vietnamese words have 2 syllables and each syllable is written separately, though both are needed to convey word meaning and each syllable is given the same stress for an equal length of time.

The next step of our research included the studying of the common errors in pronunciation of Russian as a foreign language.

Table 2: influences on L2 (where L2 is Russian)

Main "difficult" sounds	Chinese	Vietnamese
vowels		
[a]	doesn't exist in Chinese - replaced with [ə]	Put it always under the stress
[ы] ([-])	The sound doesn't exist in Chinese and often replaced with [e] or [ə]	The sound doesn't exist in Vietnamese and often replaced with [i] or [i:]
[и] ([i])	-	Add the quantity of the sound makes it [i:]
ё ([jo])	doesn't exist in Chinese - replaced with [o] or [e]	doesn't exist in Vietnamese - replaced with [o:]

Consonants		
[с], [с'], [з], [з'] (close to [s] &[z])	Omit soft sounds and use only hard versions [с] & [з]	Do not understand the difference between soft and hard consonants, and use only [с'], [з'] – due to the melodiousness of the language
[ж] ([zh])	Replace with Chinese sound from the word 人 [ren]([man])	doesn't exist in Vietnamese replaced with [dz]
[ц] ([ts])	Replaced with [dz]	doesn't exist in Vietnamese replaced with [ts]
[щ] ([sh'a])	Replace with Chinese sound from the word 师 [shi] master	doesn't exist in Vietnamese replaced with [sh'a]
[р] ([r])	Replaced with [l], if [l] doesn't exist in the regional dialect it is replaced with [n]	Add vowel in front of the sound and get [or]
[л]([l])	If [l] doesn't exist in the regional dialect then it is omitted, or replaced with [n]	doesn't exist in Vietnamese replaced with [n]
[в]([v])	Very often is omitted in the middle of the word	-
[б], [п] ([b], [p])	Often replaces one another (at the beginning of the words [б]([b]) replaces with [п] ([p])	-

After analyzing the influence of students' mother tongues on their pronunciation of Russian as L2. We have to admit that it is already some existing tendency in replacing Russian sounds with English-like ones and led us to the third step of our research.

Table 3: influences on L3 (where L3 is English)
by the combination of L1 & L2 (where L2 is Russian)

Main "difficult" sounds vowels	Chinese	Vietnamese	Influence
[æ]	[e]/[a]	[e]/[a]	L1+ L2
[əʊ] – [ʊ]	[ɔ:]	[ɔ:]	L1+ L2
[i]/[i:] [u:]/[u]	[i]/[u]	[i]/[u]	L1
[ɒ]	[a:]	[a:]	L1+ L2
[ou]	[ou:]	[ou:]	L1 +L2
Consonants/consonant clusters			
[l]	[l']	[l']	L1 +L2
[r]	[p] (Russian version)	[p] (Russian version)	L2
[w]	[v]	[v]	L1
[θ]	[z]	[z]	L2
[ð]	[s]	[s]	L2
[h]	[h]	[h]	L1+ L2
-ing	[ɪŋ]	[ɪŋ]	L1 + L2
on/un (in the middle of the word)	[ʌ]	[ʌ]	L1 + L2
Weak syllables: schwa [ə]	[ə]	[ə]	L1 + L2

Considering the results presented in the table above, we can see that despite the influence of L2 (Russian), there are significant changes to the pronunciation of L3 (English) owing the combination L1+L2.

The result of the investigation into non-native English speakers' pronunciation indicates that speakers are confused about the qualitative difference between short vowels and long vowels and the influence of L2 (Russian) interferes with it. In many languages, the diphthong [əʊ] is generally pronounced as [o], and Russian as L2 only strengthens this erroneous option. This is a significant error in non-native English pronunciation. Many English consonants that do not exist in L1 language lead to replacement or avoidance in their pronunciation; as a result, English pronunciation is negatively influenced. The combination of L1 and L2 gives false hope to the students that they can rely on the sounds of L2 language to avoid the so-called "peculiar" English accent. (example-Chinglish). Also, it has been found that in most cases, L2 negatively interferes or transfers its main problems in the acquisition of English sounds.

As a result, the influence of the Russian language as L2 changes common errors for L3 (English), especially when the skills are not yet developed. Moreover, all non-existed sounds in the native language (L1) transform into an absolutely new version of phonetic errors due to the combination of L1 and L2 and lead to an absolutely incomprehensible accent.

5. Recommendations

"Each language should be considered as something completely self-sufficient, and only then, for methodological purpose, to facilitate mutual learning, it is possible to compare two language systems"[Sherba L.V.] According to many scientist: Arakin V.D., Ahmanova O.S., Gak V.G., Yartceva V.N., Barsuk R.Y., Barhudarov L.S., and others, the inclusion of comparative analysis in the process of teaching two or more foreign languages helps to accelerate and deepen the process of understanding, memorizing and automating the language and speech skills and abilities of the students.

The usage of comparative analysis for lingua-didactic purposes requires, first of all, identifying methodologically relevant similarities and differences between the compared languages. Although it is necessary to determine the type of interlingua interference, and what difficulties may arise as a result of interlingua differences. At the final stage, it becomes necessary to create a system of exercises based on interlingua comparison as a method of teaching a non-native language.

The comparison of the studied languages for didactic purposes allows the teacher to identify the difficulties associated with the peculiarities of languages of different systems, and to find ways to overcome the difficulties. Moreover, a teaching aid is required that would be based on the results of a comparative analysis, and take into account the differences and similarities of the languages being studied, which should be reflected in the system of exercises and the presentation of the material.

At the beginning of the language educational course, it is necessary to include a separate phonetic block for both L2 and L3. Also, it is essential to use a comparative method for teaching L3, in order to anticipate interference and use positive transfer to the maximum. Not superfluous, in our opinion, is the use of authentic socio-marked materials, with a percentage increase in video and audio content.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to explore the process of teaching the phonetics of two foreign languages, English and Russian, which, should be based, according to our opinion, on the comparative analysis of the languages being studied. The results of this analysis help teachers to coordinate their work and achieve positive results. The similarities and differences in the phonetic systems of the languages studied in parallel not only help students to better understand and assimilate the studied linguistic phenomena and processes but also contribute to the development of linguistic conjecture, broadening their horizons and increasing motivation.

The comparative study of two foreign languages is also useful for a deeper understanding of linguistic phenomena and processes that take place in Russian (L2), English (L3) and the native languages of students. Studying several foreign languages is not an isolated process, but an interdependent and interconnected simultaneous process, based on the results of the comparative analysis of languages and on the linguistic experience of students.

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