A STUDY ON NATIVE-LIKE PRONUNCIATION MATTERS ENCOUNTERED BY THIRD-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FOOD INDUSTRY IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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Abstract: A study of challenges with native-like pronunciation encountered by third-year English majors at HUFU based on theory, previous study results, and the situation of English learning of students specializing in English at HUFU. Pronunciation is an important part of the speech process. Pronunciation should be worked on right from the start of language instruction. Pronunciation aids in the understanding of most information transmitted when communicating with students in English when learning and practicing language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Practice is the most important factor in achieving proficiency and fluency. The production and reception of sounds used in speech are referred to as pronunciation. This study is a hybrid of qualitative and quantitative methods. According to a 2021 survey of 50 university students, students understand the importance of English communication skills in general and English pronunciation in particular. However, this does not reflect the reality of student learning. Furthermore, empirical research shows that audiovisual tools, the use of a problem-solving strategy for improving pronunciation, and the method for improving pronunciation in a voice control system are the most effective and widely used methods for improving pronunciation.

Keywords: Pronunciation; English major; improving; communication; encountered

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Since the late 1980s, when the Communicative Approach became a buzzword among people in the sectors of language education in Vietnam, both English teachers and students appear to have fewer challenges in their teaching and learning. Even if English major students have excellent vocabulary and grammar knowledge, they will be unable to communicate effectively if their pronunciation falls below a certain standard level. English majors who pronounce words correctly are more likely to be understood even if they make mistakes in other areas, whereas those who pronounce words badly will not be understood even if their grammar is flawless. Though pronunciation is an important part of learning oral skills in a second language, many English teachers keep this in mind. There are a plethora of English pronunciation books on the market, as well as E-learning websites regarded as good English resources, to familiarize students with understandable pronunciation. However, these materials are primarily written for general students by English native speakers. None of them are exclusive to Vietnamese students, with an emphasis on the unique challenges that Vietnamese students face.

1.2 The problem of the study

Many complaints have been lodged in Vietnam's various provinces over the subject of teaching pronunciation in high school. There is little doubt that both high school teachers and students are frequently put under pressure by time constraints, curriculum material, and the expectation of students, parents, and staff that kids will perform well in exams. As a result, the format of the English test for the high school graduation examination is carefully considered. As a result, they are nearly conditioned to perform well on examinations based on reading comprehension, writing, and grammar. From an antidotal standpoint, numerous teachers, particularly those in the 12th grade, believe that they would rather provide their pupils with some knowledge of lexis and syntax to prepare for their exams than waste time teaching speaking skills or enhancing student pronunciation. In reality, even though they are aware of the importance of pronunciation, high school students pay little attention to it. As a consequence, when exposed to an English-speaking world, students lack considerable proficiency in using the language they learn in class to sustain real-life dialogue or to convey their intended meanings. Dalton (2002) agreed with the initial statements as well that "We have comfortable lecturing, writing, listening and general oral qualifications, but we often lack basic (not difficult to get) pieces of knowledge of articulatory phonetics to provide our students anything but basic and frequently ineffective counseling when it comes to pronunciation. In terms of pronunciation, the Domino effects of high school are no exception for English students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFI). Many English language students find it difficult to learn native-like pronunciation. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (2010) state that this is not only linguistic. Some factors that have a bearing on the development of native pronunciation today need to be taken into consideration, such as the age of English language students, their exposure to their learning languages, type of previous pronunciation education, the attitude of the students regarding their target language and motivation to employ understandable second-language speech patterns. These factors are critical in deciding proper English-speaking results. Learning to pronounce words correctly can be interpreted as a method in which students learn the rules of pronunciation and automatically apply these rules. As a result, students must be mindful of phonological and phonemic knowledge. Furthermore, cultural awareness is essential for developing good pronunciation.

1.3 *Aim of the study*

The primary aim of this paper is to address the difficulties that English-major students at HUFI face while attempting to develop native-like pronunciation. Special emphasis is placed on effective methods for improving pronunciation, the importance of cultural understanding, phonological and phonemic awareness, and some effective strategies for teaching pronunciation.

1.4 *Significance of the study*

This analysis will be carried out with many predicted outcomes in mind. For starters, it will cause English teachers at HUFI to rethink the critical task of improving students' pronunciation in addition to other important English skills. Second, the results of this study will have a direct impact on the perspectives of teaching and learning communicative pronunciation at HUFI. First, teachers can understand how to successfully integrate the training's basic knowledge into their teaching. The students would then understand how to pay careful attention to intelligible pronunciation, which is critical for their communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Definition of pronunciation*

According to Stevick (1978), pronunciation can be described as the primary medium by which we bring our use of language to the attention of other people. It is the mechanism by which features related to the system of sounds or phonemes, the syllabic

structure, prosody (word stress and intonation), and speech or oral verbal message are materialized while speech or oral verbal message is constructed.

2.2. Preliminary considerations in teaching pronunciation

It is no secret that English is a challenging language to pronounce. The researchers offer various explanations for why English spelling and pronunciation are not well coordinated for English language students, including the fact that English has more sounds than letters and that one letter can produce multiple sounds. Furthermore, the English language does not allow for the use of accent marks to indicate word stress. However, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (2010) say that stress is really important. As a result, knowing the rules of syllable stress is essential.

Avery & Ehrlich (1992) discussed two contrasting perspectives on teaching pronunciation in the ESL classroom. Although one school of thought believes that teaching pronunciation helps eliminate foreign accents, the opposing school of thought believes that teaching pronunciation to adult learners is a waste of time due to brain fossilization after puberty. He contends that none of these points of view are precise. In the acquisition of a second language sound system, biological, sociocultural, personality, and linguistic influences all play a role. As a result, Avery & Ehrlich (1992) may conclude that while practice does not make better, avoiding pronunciation completely can be a great disservice to ESL students.

Furthermore, English is regarded as an orthographically conservative language. Because of this, when a term is borrowed into English, its spelling is frequently preserved while its pronunciation is adjusted to fit the English sound pattern. They should master two languages in general: spoken and written English. Many Indo-European languages are recognized to have fairly basic pronunciation rules. There is no difference in pronunciation between the terms "tail" and "tale" [teil], or "knight" and "night" [nait], for example. The context provides insight into the word's meaning.

2.3. Strategy training

Richards & Schmidt (2014) described strategy training as an instructor in the use of learning strategies to increase the effectiveness of learners. There are many approaches to strategy training, including:

- (1) Explicit or direct training: learners are informed about the value and purpose of specific strategies;
- (2) Embedded strategy training: the strategies to be taught are not explicitly taught but are embedded in the regular content of an academic subject area, such as reading, math, or science;
- (3) Combination strategy training: explicit strategy training is followed by embedded training.

Hedge (2008) proposes actions that language teachers should take to assist ill-equipped language learners. Teachers should use positive attitudes to motivate students and encourage them to use effective methods. Such training can be both psychological and realistic. Holec (1985) described psychological preparation as a change in understanding of what learning entails and a change in the expectation that language can only be learned under the careful supervision of a specialist instructor. Practical training entails a variety of strategies that learners may use to improve their learning. Meanwhile, Hedge (2008) describes learner training as a series of procedures or activities that raises learners' knowledge of what is involved in learning a foreign language, encourages learners to become more involved, engaged, and responsible in their learning, and helps them improve and enhance their strategies for language learning. (Hedge)'s attitude toward learning training is depicted in the graph below:

(Research conducted by the author)

Hedge (2008) categorizes learner training behavior into three groups based on its primary goal:

- Activities that encourage students to focus on their learning
- Activities that teach tactics and prepare students to be involved
- Activities that allow students to track and evaluate their progress.

2.4. Phonetic training

Intelligible pronunciation is defined by Kenworthy (1999) as the speaker's intended utterance completely comprehended by a listener at a given time in a particular setting. That is, students can understand, accept, and claim themselves to be meaningfully organized in oral communication. Morley (1991) points out that a necessary component of communication competence. In reality, Morley (1998) states that pronunciation is crucial in helping a learner become an intelligible speaker. As a result, teachers should be aware of how to include pronunciation in their classes. When teaching pronunciation to students, the emphasis should be on meaningful communication. Pronunciation is an exciting challenge for both teachers and students since it involves a variety of crucial factors such as stress, rhythm, linking and assimilation, and consonant and vowel sounds.

3. Materials and Methods

The quantitative methodology was closely adhered to in this study, to collect a collection of quantitative data, including student replies to questionnaires, to learn about the participants' backgrounds. This questionnaire collects basic information about participants such as their full name, school year, biological sex, self-assessment of pronunciation skills, and answers to research topics such as reasons for not being able to pronounce English properly, tactics for improving pronunciation, and the most needed improvement to sound like a native.

3.1. Participants

The students who took part were all English majors at HUFI. Fifty students were invited to take part in the research. Pronunciation skills are assessed on a four-band scale, from Band 1 to Band 4. Band 1 is the lowest (very limited English pronunciation) and Band 4 is the highest (very good pronunciation of English). This study's fifty participants are all individuals who believe they are in Band 2 or Band 3.

3.2. Research instruments

Context questionnaire for study participants to gather preliminary data for the study

3.3. Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a form of writing instrument that presents you with a set of questions or statements with which they will interact by writing down their response or selecting from among the available answers Brown J. D. (2001). The questionnaire was chosen as a study tool because it is one of the most widely used data collection methods in L2 studies, as well as being simple to construct and use.

4. Results

Data on the English pronunciation of students have been collected using the questionnaire. Scaled analysis of statements.

1) What is your biological gender?

2) How much time do you spend for studying English?

3) The reasons you can not get better in pronunciation?

4) What pronunciation improvement methods have you used?

5) Which factor you need to improve the most?

5. Discussion

It was considered that the research participants based on the data acquired from the questionnaire that they have a basic understanding of phonetics and pronunciation. The majority of the participants had a hazy comprehension of the terms used in pronunciation. They discovered that pronunciation was not systematic, therefore they only had a hazy memory of certain components of pronunciation. As a result, they were unable to retrieve as many characteristics of pronunciation as they needed.

Language skills were greatly influenced their pronunciation. Because they lack confidence in communication, those who did not perform well were poor in speaking, listening, and vocabulary. Incorrect pronunciation generated incorrect English sounds in their brain, and as a result, they were unable to recognize familiar terms when properly pronounced. Similarly, students with poor pronunciation learn vocabulary by writing it down as many times as possible instead of trying to recite it out. Their simple methods of looking at and writing down words result in a substantial loss of vocabulary retention.

Finally, there is an urgent need to assist them in improving their pronunciation skills.

5.1. Recommendation

5.1.1. Certain successful pronunciation teaching strategies

Collins & Mees (2013) point out that the main goal of teaching native-like pronunciation is to eradicate any signs of a foreign accent through efficient pronunciation practice (p. 43). Besides, Nghi & Khuong (2021) discovered that an active communication environment provides the opportunity for learners to communicate, resulting in improved

communication abilities. Collins & Mees (2013) believe that teaching good pronunciation after a certain age is futile due to the decreasing ability among learners to produce native-like pronunciation in a second language. However, there are certain effective approaches for teaching good pronunciation that may be utilized to help adult English language learners dramatically improve their pronunciation.

5.1.1.1. Teaching phonetics

Phonetics must be taught to achieve good pronunciation. Phonetics instruction explains how sound is formed as air flows through the vocal tract. Dalton & Seidlhofer (1994) point out that teaching phonetics is regarded to be the first step in teaching native-like pronunciation. Barton (2006) states that learners should be able to recognize the numerous sounds that each letter can make and use the existing phonetic rules for making the sounds of each letter in the English alphabet using the lips, tongue, throat, and air stream. Learners should use the International Phonetic Alphabet's phonetic symbols. A Received (Standard) Pronunciation is the model for learning good pronunciation.

5.1.1.2. Rhyming technique

The sounds of English words that are spelled the same way are often the same. Students who are learning English might use a rhyming strategy to practice their pronunciation (e.g. nest-rest-best-test). They should, in other words, read rhyming words. Learners can practice using the rhyming words strategy by reading music lyrics, poetry, or specially designed rhyming books. It is critical to choose content that is both fascinating and familiar to the students. Learners will be able to discover rhyme patterns and enhance their pronunciation using this strategy. Furthermore, tongue twisters can be used to successfully drill certain target sounds and pronunciation skills (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). The following is one of the most popular tongue twisters:

Betty Batter had some butter
 "But", she said "this butter's bitter",
 If I bake this bitter butter
 It would make my batter bitter.

5.1.1.3. Teaching syllables

One of the most significant pronunciation approaches is syllable teaching. It aids pupils in the division of words into sounds in the English language. Learners will be able to break down words into syllables by clapping in this scenario. A combination of letters with only one vowel sound is how the term syllable is defined by Carver & Pantoja (2009). CVC, CV, Cle, R-control, CVCe, and CVVC are the six primary syllable forms in English (p. 3). A consonant is C, a vowel is V, a syllable with a letter at the end is e, and R-control is the "r" that comes after the vowel is R. When students say each piece of the word, they clap. Experts also suggest expressing syllable stress by clapping softly and loudly, corresponding to the syllables of a word (for example, the word "amazing" – soft-loud-soft). This strategy will assist learners in hearing separate bits of words and practicing pronunciation properly.

5.1.1.4. Intonation technique

Intonation is a method for pronouncing parts of words and sentences in speech. The technique of intonation can be used to teach pronunciation since some sounds are stressed while others are soft (for example, the word "hello" – hell-o, where the -o is emphasized but the first syllable is soft). It is recommended that learners learn to pronounce words utilizing intonation by focusing their attention on sounds (both soft and stressed) (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). Adult English language learners typically utilize this strategy to correctly pronounce each sound of a word and to better grasp the differences between the sounds in the words they speak. In general, intonation is important in communication since it can provide additional meaning to speech material.

5.1.2. Some effective ways to enhance pronunciation

5.1.2.1. Audiovisual tools

The use of audio technology aids in the learning of English as a second language by improving pronunciation. Audio technology, in general, aids in the detection of pronunciation mistakes, particularly when peer collaboration mechanisms are used. Identifying pronunciation problems is undoubtedly challenging because it necessitates excellent self-observation, judgment, and reflection abilities said to Dettori & Lupi (2013). Learning phonetic segmental features of speech sounds is a common challenge for adult English language learners. Audiovisual tools aid in the improvement of pronunciation and the detection of all phonetic faults made by learners during the speech process.

The fundamental purpose of using audiovisual tools is to develop phonetic competence as well as to remove the foreign accent. Various computer-assisted English language learning environments are recommended. For instance, American English Pronunciation Patterns Network Edition 7.0 + Lifetime Online Content (Based on Phonics) is useful software for improving pronunciation and reducing accent. The program offers 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonant sounds with video explanations, 100 often used pronunciation patterns, fundamental phonics principles, and over 4,000 words organized by patterns and rules (Dettori & Lupi, 2013). Another example is the usage of pronunciation patterns websites, which can assist in better understanding basic phonetic rules, identifying consonant and vowel variances, practicing speech online, and using video players to practice pronunciation abilities (Dettori & Lupi, 2013).

5.1.2.2. Problem-Solving Strategy for Improving Pronunciation

Rusbult (2011) states that a problem-solving method can be used to improve pronunciation. Through enhanced motivation, his concepts aid in the learning of a new language. This approach can assist an adult English language student to improve pronunciation skills in a short period if they are eager to learn the language and speak it properly with a minimal foreign accent. An issue can be considered as an opportunity to improve things in this (Rusbult, 2011). Learners can turn the current NOW situation into the desired GOAL situation during the problem-solving process. The following are some of the most important conversation skills: speaking slowly enough to say each sound clearly and unambiguously; stressing the correct syllables inside a word; putting a lot of emphasis on the right words in a phrase (Rusbult, 2011).

Rusbult (2011) said that the design technique is the most important step in the 3-Step Method for Improving Pronunciation since it focuses on proper Quality Checks. An excellent way for enhancing speech that adult English language learners can employ is a problem-solving strategy. Step 1 involves identifying a goal, Step 2 involves planning, assessing, and testing with a method, and Step 3 requires applying the Design Method (Rusbult, 2011).

5.1.2.3. Method for enhancing voice control pronunciation

A unique style of voice enunciation allows a student to sound out text files. When the text files are being read aloud and the student is unhappy with their pronunciation of a single word or a collection of words, the system allows the learner to substitute the mispronounced word with their own. Furthermore, the method allows learners to save their preferred pronunciation of a word in a specific dictionary so that they can correctly pronounce the word whenever they meet it in the future.

5.1.2.4. The significance for effective pronunciation of cultural awareness

Many experts believe that learning to pronounce effectively is commonly considered as a process in which rules are acquired by heart and automated, but improving pronunciation also requires metacognition (Dettori & Lupi, 2013). This means that students should be acutely aware of their utterances, as well as the ability to assess their pronunciation concerning that of others. Learners' views about language might be influenced by cultural awareness. Barton (2006) states that they are unlikely to be motivated to study it if learners have a negative attitude toward native speakers of the language they are learning or are unaware of its cultural worth. As a result, it is suggested that cultural awareness be incorporated into the learning process.

Cultural sensitivity is also covered in the MFL parts of the National Curriculum Program of Study. Learners of various ages, on the whole, show a strong interest in cultural background material. To help adult English language learners develop native-like pronunciation, teachers should place the language in its cultural context, making it more alive and exciting. Gao & Zhang (2010) said that attitude has endless power to assist learners to develop their oral English rapidly and effectively (p. 72). In general, their positive attitude toward native speaker culture might assist in determining the best time to practice native-like pronunciation.

5.1.2.5. The significance for proper pronunciation of phonological and phonemical awareness

For good pronunciation in general phonological knowledge and phonemic awareness are particularly crucial. The research shows that 'the determination of the importance of phonology is consistent with the principle of design of sound-based alphabetical writing systems, in which each graph represents normally a phoneme. This means that graphs are translated by the rule application into phonemes and the meaning of the word via phonology is derived. Phonological and phonemic awareness, in general, are important aspects of word recognition because they allow students to better understand the relationship between a printed word and its sound representation. Understanding how words are broken down into syllables and how syllables are made up of phonemes gives you the tools you need to improve your pronunciation (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). When it comes to accessing the meaning of a word through the split of the word into smaller parts, phonological awareness is critical (e. g. cor-po-ra-tion). Furthermore, phonological awareness has an impact on the ability to process words on a single-word basis.

5.2. Limitations

None of the studies are carried out without certain constraints. This one isn't an outlier. There are three key drawbacks to the study. First, the research sample was small and limited to the HUFU; as a result, the findings cannot be applied to a wide range of English learners. Second, the therapy activities were not intended to cover all critical aspects of pronunciation, and they were very simple. These flaws will be addressed in the future when the study carrier conducts additional research in their teaching career. Finally, the researcher would like to make the most important change to the period of experimental teaching. Because the trial lasted only a few weeks, not long enough for predicted improvements to materialize, the researcher was dissatisfied with the results to some extent. And the study's author was able to explore new research avenues as a result of these limitations. In future studies, he hopes to improve these weak places to achieve his goal of improving English learners' pronunciation.

6. Conclusions

The following conclusions appear to be appropriate based on the study's findings:

Both English professors and students at HUFU are interested in improving students' pronunciation. When students become active participants in their learning and the teacher supports their efforts by adopting a variety of approaches to encourage students in their efforts to enhance their pronunciation, students can acquire native-like pronunciation in the L2. However, for both of them, it was a tough and fulfilling experience.

The current syllabus and course material may not be of use to HUFU English majors in improving their pronunciation. They didn't have enough time to improve their pronunciation, and the coursebook was not well-prepared for pronunciation training and instruction.

As a result, it is necessary to conclude that pronunciation is extremely important in the speech process. It is influenced by several aspects, including the learners' cultural, phonological, and phonemic awareness, as well as word stress, intonation, sentence stress, and word linking. At the same time, English pronunciation has a level of difficulty

for learners who want to eliminate all accents from their speech. Enhancing one's pronunciation can undoubtedly benefit them, enhancing their self-esteem, improving their communication abilities, and even resulting in better interpersonal connections at work.

7. Patents

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