

Language Learner Language
A Case of Seventh Semester Students of the English
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Abstract: This paper describes the language of the language learners-language learner language - especially the pronunciation of the seventh semester students of the English department, Faculty of Education, Atma Jaya Catholic University Jakarta. Four major sub-topics are discussed in this paper which include the definition of interlanguage, the factors affecting interlanguage, some research findings on interlanguage, the result of observation, and the conclusion and suggestion. On the basis of the theoretical background and the result of the observation, it is concluded that: (1) the inaccurate pronunciation of the English of the learners is a natural one from the point of view of SLA, (2) L2 learning differs from first language acquisition in that it is seldom successful, (3) the incorrect pronunciation of the learners should not be considered as something that is not allowed to occur but should be realized as something natural, and (4) the pronunciation specific of the learners is mostly as a result of overgeneralization of the kind of rules of pronouncing the words.

Key words: language learners, interlanguage, pronunciation

Every person needs a language to communicate. The language used to communicate can be his native/first language (L_1), second language or other languages (L_2), or even his para languages. In order to master L_1 , it is not too difficult for a person to do so because most of the time he is ex-

posed to natural settings and everywhere he meets native speakers who are ready to be the source people and models. Learning L₂, however, is not that easy especially when a person learns the language outside the country where the L₂ is used. Indonesian learners of English in Indonesia, for example, will have many problems such as not having enough exposure to practice the language, and enough source people to practice with, etc.

These conditions result in the incomplete mastery of the target language. This incomplete mastery of the target language has been the main phenomenon of the result of every L₂ learning. This idea is also supported by Selinker (1972) in Cook (1994:18) who stated that "L₂ learning differs from first language acquisition in that it is seldom completely successful only 5 per cent of L₂ learners have 'absolute success' in his view." The other 95 per cent learners are less successful in learning the L₂.

This paper tries to review this language learner language or "interlanguage", as Selinker (1972) proposed, or "approximative systems", as Nemser (1971) named, which covers the definition of each of these terms, its differences and similarities, the factors affecting this particular language, some research findings on interlanguage, some observation results on interlanguage of seventh semester students of the English department, Faculty of Education, Atma Jaya Catholic University Jakarta, the writer's opinion, conclusion and suggestion.

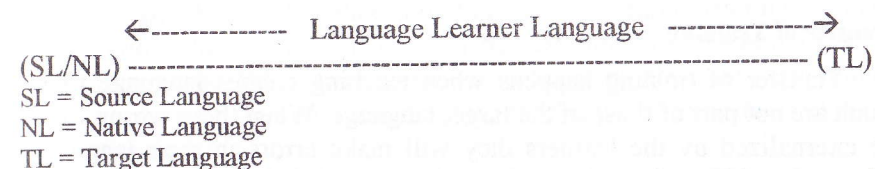
THE DEFINITION OF INTERLANGUAGE

Interlanguage, often abbreviated IL, was the term introduced by Larry Selinker (1972) that became widely accepted for the L2 learner's independent language system" (Cook, 1994). Various terms have been used by different researchers to refer to the same phenomenon; Nemser (1971) named it 'approximative systems', and Corder (1971) refers to 'idiosyncratic dialects' and 'transitional competence'.

Basically those terms reflect related but different concept. Interlanguage refers to the structured system which the learner constructs at any given stage in his development of acquiring/ learning a target language. Corder (1967) refers the term to the series of interlocking systems which form the learner's 'built in syllabus'. Nemser (1981) defined the term 'approximative system' as "the deviant linguistic system which the learner

employs when trying to use the target language. The learner passes through a number of 'approximative systems' on the way to acquiring full target language proficiency" (Ellis, 1986:292).

From the definitions above the three terms interlanguage, idiosyncratic dialects, transitional competence, and approximative system look very similar in meaning, that is, each of the terms refers to the learner language that is neither his native language nor his target language, the language that the learner is learning. The learner language, therefore, lies between the native language and the target language of the learner. This can be drawn as follows:



The more the learner learns and masters the target language the nearer the learner language approaches the target language. That is why Nemser named this particular learner language 'approximative systems'. He believed that at a particular point of time a successful language learner will reach the perfect achievement of the target language. There are only approximately 5% of this kind of absolute successful learners out of the whole language learners. Interlanguage, idiosyncratic dialects, and transitional competence are different from Nemser's approximative systems in that they do not necessarily mean approaching the target language.

THE FACTORS AFFECTING INTERLANGUAGE

In general learner language must be affected by either the native language or the target language or both of them or still other possible factors. According to Selinker (1972) in Cook (1994:18), in Richards (1974:37), in Ellis (1986:48) interlanguage depends on five central processes that are part of the 'latent psychological structure': language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication, and overgeneralization of target language linguistic material.

Language Transfer

Language transfer is the process of using knowledge of the first language in learning a second language. Transfer can be positive or negative. Language transfer is considered positive when a first language pattern identical with a target-language pattern is transferred. Language transfer is considered negative when a first-language pattern different from the target-language pattern is transferred. This negative transfer hinders the language learner to master the target language successfully. Thus the learner language cannot achieve the target language.

Transfer of Training

Transfer of training happens when teaching creates language rules which are not part of those of the target language. When these wrong rules are internalized by the learners they will make errors in their language they produce. Therefore, they will not improve their language because of the wrong training.

Strategies of Second Language Learning

These strategies of second language learning are kinds of simplification made by the learners of the target language due to the inability of the learners to produce the same pattern of the target language. The learners probably use their own rules to produce certain rules that they have not mastered. Their rules probably result in wrong utterances that make their language inaccurate. For example, instead of using the auxiliary 'does' in the sentence 'He does not have to speak English if he cannot', the learners probably produce either '*He do not have to speak English if he cannot', '*He is not have to speak English if he cannot', '*He does not has to speak English if he cannot', or probably other wrong forms. The reason of simplifying the sentence to become '*He do not have to speak English if he cannot' is that the learners think that the only auxiliary verb is 'do'. The reason of producing the sentence '*He is not have to speak English if he cannot' is that the learners think that the only auxiliary verb is 'is' and when they produce the sentence '*He does not has to speak English if he cannot' they think that the auxiliary 'does' does not have any effect on the

verb form of that sentence.

Strategies of Second Language Communication

These strategies are those employed by learners of a second language when they are faced with the task of communicating meanings but they do not know what words to use. In other words, the learners lack the requisite linguistic knowledge. Examples of these strategies are when they have to refer to some object but they do not know the L2 word. In order to solve this kind of problem, learners usually paraphrase or mime the meanings. They use paraphrase when they want to refer to a certain meaning but they do not know the exact word or term by restating the meaning in other words they know. When they do not know the paraphrase they use mime, that is explaining their meaning they want to express using their expression without words.

Overgeneralization of Target Language Linguistic Material

Overgeneralization in either first or second language acquisition results in errors in the target language the learners are learning. The generalization of the rules of the target language they are learning is too far that the items they generalize are not covered in the rules. There are many examples of this kind of errors in the area of morphology, syntax, phonology, and so on.

In the morphology, for example, many plural forms of nouns in English are formed by adding -s, or -es to their singular forms such as 'a book' becomes 'books', 'a cat' becomes 'cats', 'a class' becomes 'classes', etc. Some exceptions, however, occur in forming plural forms in English like 'a child' becomes 'children', 'a man' becomes 'men' to which the ending -s or -es are not added. The learners who have not mastered the whole rules may overgeneralize the rules of the ending -s and -es in the exception rules, thus they produce '*childs' instead of 'children', '*mans' instead of 'men', etc.

In the syntax area, for example, in the complex sentence containing a 'relative clause' learners of English often omit the use of the relative pronouns 'who', 'which', or 'that'. For example, the sentence 'The man who(m) you met yesterday is my father' can be alternatively stated 'The man you

met yesterday is my father'. But the sentence 'The man who met me yesterday is my father' cannot be overgeneralized to become '*The man met me yesterday is my father.' In those two examples of complex sentences containing a relative clause, each sentence has its own rule, therefore both of them cannot be generalized.

In phonology there is a kind of rules in English. Most /i/ vowel is pronounced [ai] such as the words 'mine' is pronounced [main], 'dine' is pronounced [dain], 'define' is pronounced [di'fain]. This rule may lead to pronunciation errors in pronouncing such words as 'examine' and 'determine'. They pronounce the words *[igzæ'main] instead of [ig'zæmin] and *[ditð:'main] instead of [di'tð:min] respectively.

Most /u/ vowel is pronounced /ʌ/, therefore, such words as 'but' is pronounced [bʌt], 'nut' - [nʌt], 'such' - [sʌtʃ], and so on. This kind of rule also leads to pronunciation errors like in pronouncing the words 'success' - *[sʌkses] instead of [sʊk'ses], 'suggest' - *[sʌdʒest] instead of [sʊdʒest], etc.

These five central processes that are part of the 'latent psychological structure': language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication, and overgeneralization of target language linguistic material affect all English language learners no matter what native language the learners have. The following section will review some research findings on interlanguage especially in the aspects of morphology, syntax, and phonology.

SOME RESEARCH FINDINGS ON INTERLANGUAGE

The actual second language acquisition (SLA) refers to all aspects of language that the language learners need to master, but because most research on SLA focus on morphology, syntax, and some on phonology this section reviews some research findings on interlanguage especially in the aspects of morphology, syntax, and phonology.

Morphology

SLA researchers have done a lot of studies called the morpheme studies. These studies are usually related to the acquisition of grammatical morphemes in obligatory contexts, i.e. contexts where the target language

requires a particular linguistic structure such as the plural marker at the end of a common English noun preceded by a cardinal number (Freeman and Long, 1991). Huda (1984) stated that there are between four and fourteen morphemes studied by different researchers.

Huda studied thirteen morphemes in his research. The thirteen morphemes studied are as follows: (1) copula 'be': be, am, is, are, was, were, (2) auxiliary 'be': those used in progressive and passive, (3) auxiliary 'have': have, has, had which are not categorized as a full verb, (4) third person singular verb: includes only regular verbs, (5) past regular verb: all regular past verb morphemes as /d/ in washed, /t/ in talked, /d/ in wanted, (6) past irregular verb: all past irregular verbs, (7) past participle verb: all verbs used in passive and perfect, (8) progressive: any -ing form for the progressive, (9) short plural: all regular plural such as /s/ in cats, and /z/ in bags, (10) long plural: like regular plural ending in /z/ as in houses, (11) possessive: limited to 's like in John's book, (12) definite article: the, and (13) indefinite article: a and an.

The question investigated in that study was whether a natural order exists in the verbal utterances of language learners in a foreign language setting. There were two hypotheses that were put forth: (1) the monitor has systematic effects on the order of acquisition and the accuracy of performance, and (2) there are significant, positive correlations between orders of acquisition in second language settings and in a foreign language setting.

Oral production, unedited compositions, and edited compositions were elicited using a BSM-type instrument and a composition test. The subjects were 100 EFL students at the Institute of Teacher Training and Education in Malang in 1982. They were selected by a stratified random sampling procedure. The oral productions and the unedited compositions represented unmonitored data, and the edited compositions represented monitored data. Thirteen morphemes as stated above were isolated and scored in four ways. The orders of acquisition were determined using rank ordering, hierarchy analysis, and implicational scaling techniques.

A natural order was found in the oral productions. The orders of acquisition in the unedited and edited compositions are similar, but they differ from the order in the oral productions. The monitor does affect the order of acquisition and significantly improves the accuracy of performance.

The order of acquisition in the oral productions correlates significantly with the other studies in second language settings.

Syntax

There are a lot of SLA studies related to syntax. Some of them even overlap with the morpheme studies. Cook (1994) reported sequences in SLA concentrating on two areas of grammatical morphemes and negation. In relation to the grammatical morphemes Cook (1994:28) reported the research by H. C. Dulay and M. K. Burt (1973) entitled 'Should We Teach Children Syntax?'. The aim of the research was whether there was a common sequence with which children acquiring English as a second language learn certain structures? The aspect of language was eight grammatical morphemes including plural "-s", progressive "-ing", copula "be", auxiliary "be", articles "the/a", irregular past, third person "-s", possessive "-s". The data type was sentences elicited via the BSM (Bilingual Syntax Measure) cartoon description and the L2 learners were 151 Spanish-speaking children aged 6-8 learning English in the USA. The method of analysis was (i) scoring 8 grammatical morphemes supplied in obligatory contexts, (ii) ordering these from most often supplied to least often supplied. The result was reported that 'there does seem to be a common order of acquisition for certain structures in L2 acquisition' (Dulay and Burt, 1973:256).

In relation to negation and the learner's language system Cook (1994:39) reported H. Wode (1981) research entitled *Learning a Second Language* with the aim to describe the stages in acquisition of negation. The learners were four German-speaking children aged 3:11 (three years and eleven months) to 8:11 (eight years and eleven months) learning English in the USA. The aspect of language studied was negative elements. The data type was naturally occurring sentences recorded in a diary, supplemented with some tests. The method of analysis was using transcripts. The result reported was a clear sequence of acquisition for negation with features unique to L2 acquisition.

Other studies related to syntax and SLA are reported by Cook (1994) like relative clauses, the pro-drop parameter, the Head-direction parameter, and so on. In this paper the first two topics are reported.

First, about relative clauses Cook (1994:142) reported S. Gass (1979)

research on 'Language Transfer and Universal Grammatical Relations'. The aim of the research was L1 transfer applied to the L2 acquisition of relative clauses. The learners under study were 17 L2 learners of English with nine different L1s. The aspect of language was the Accessibility Hierarchy as applied to English relative clauses. The method used in the research was grammaticality judgement of 29 sentences and combination of sentence pairs. The result was reported that the order of difficulty had a clear relationship to the Accessibility Hierarchy, except for genitive clauses. Further Cook reported the conclusion made by Gass (1979) that 'the likelihood of the transferability of linguistic phenomena must take into account both target language facts and rules of universal grammar'.

Second, about the pro-drop parameter, Cook (1994:166) reported L. White (1986) research on 'Implications of Parametric Variation for Adult Second Language Acquisition: An investigation of the pro-drop Parameter' in V. J. Cook (ed.), *Experimental Approaches to Second Language Acquisition* (Oxford: Pergamon Press). The aim of this research was to test whether L1 parameter settings influence L2 learning and whether all aspects of a parameter hang together in L2 learning. The learners under study were 37 French speakers, and 32 Spanish and 2 Italian speakers. The aspect of language studied was the pro-drop parameter that distinguishes non-pro-drop languages like English, from pro-drop languages such as Italian in terms of optional or compulsory presence of subjects, subject-verb inversion, and that trace. The method used in this study was grammaticality judgements on 28 English sentences and turning sentences into questions. The result summary was reported that Spanish/Italians wrongly accepted more null subject sentences and made more that-trace mistakes than the French speakers but there were no differences for Subject-Verb inversion. The conclusion drawn from this study was that 'L1 parameters influence the adult learner's view of the L2 data, at least for a while, leading to transfer errors' (White, 1986:69).

Phonology

It was reported in some book (I am not sure in what book) that the frequency of SLA research related to phonology is very low. As reported by Cook (1994) that early SLA research was conducted due to the interference of two language systems that relate to each other in the mind of

the same individual who learn another language other than his native language. The key concept of interference was defined as "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language" (Weinreich, 1953:1 in Cook, 1994:8). Therefore interference can happen in all language systems that can result in the phonological difficulty when a learner tries to speak the target language. A learner may ignore the distinction of certain phonemes of the target language due to the absence of distinction of the same phonemes in his native language. An example was given for French learners of English. Some of them fail to distinguish between two English phonemes /i/ like in 'kin' and /i:/ like in 'keen' easily because there is no such distinction in their L1.

With the same concept of interference some Indonesian learners of English may fail to pronounce the words 'thing' /θiŋ/, 'this' /ðIs/, 'change' /tʃeɪndʒ/ and so on because there is no such sounds in Indonesian. Also it is quite difficult to see the difference between, for example, the phonemes /f/ and /v/ like in the words 'ferry' and 'very', /e/ and /æ/ like in the words 'bed' and 'bad'.

In addition to interference of the L1 and L2, overgeneralization of the target language rules can also affect the learner language performance. For example, many words in English containing the phoneme /u/ is pronounced /ju:/ like 'mutual' /'mjʊtʃʊəl/, 'dual' /'dju:əl/, 'June' /dʒu:n/, and so on. When the learners find the words 'just', 'must', 'trust' which should be pronounced /dʒʌst/, /mʌst/, and /trʌst/ respectively, or the words 'burden', 'burst', 'burglar' which should be pronounced /'bɜ:dn/, /bɜ:st/, and /'bɜ:glə/ respectively they may overgeneralize the pronunciation of the phoneme /u/, then they may commit errors.

The next section reports the writer's observation of the English pronunciation of the seventh semester students of the English department of Atma Jaya University Jakarta where he used to teach.

RESULT OF OBSERVATION

The observation reported here is the result of several-semester observation on several different groups of learners who took the subject of English Instructional Design for senior high schools. The skill observed is

mainly their speaking skill. This decision is taken because the learners had the turns at least once to summarize and present a chapter of the assigned book on Instructional Design. The summary was usually good and there was no significant errors. The oral presentation, however, as far as the writer observed revealed some permanent pronunciation mistakes. This report, therefore, is limited to the learners' pronunciation performance.

Some learners were really excellent at all aspects of the English language including the four language skills and the other elements including the pronunciation. Some others, however, showed unsatisfying pronunciation deviations. Among the pronunciation deviations that the learners committed are as follows: 'success' and the other related words such as 'succeed', 'successful', and 'successfully'. They pronounced the words */s^kses/, */s^ksi:d/, */s^ksesful/, and */s^ksesfull/ instead of /sɒk'ses/, /sɒk'si:d/, /sɒk'sesful/, and /sɒk'sesfull/ respectively.

The other words that they often pronounced incorrectly were 'suggest' and its inflections. Just like the pronunciation of the words 'success' above the learners pronounced the word 'suggest' */s^dʒest/ instead of /sɒ'dʒest/.

The other words that the learners often pronounced incorrectly were the words 'analyze', 'analysis', 'analyses'. Since the pronunciation of the verb 'analyze' is /'ænəlaɪz/, they often pronounced the noun form 'analysis' */'ænə'laisi:/ instead of pronouncing /'nælə'sis/. In addition to that they still got difficulty pronouncing the other inflections of the word 'analyze' that they encountered such as the words 'analyst', 'analytic', 'analytical', etc.

Similarly, the writer often observed the wrong pronunciation of the word 'emphasis', 'emphasize'. The learners often pronounced the two words similarly */'emfə'sais/ instead of pronouncing /'emfə'sis/ and /'emfə'saɪz/ respectively.

The deviant pronunciation that the learners often committed but not identified easily was when they pronounced the words 'doubt' and 'debt'. They usually pronounced the words */doub/ and */deb/ instead of /daʊt/ and /det/ respectively.

The most striking errors that the writer often observed were the pronunciation of the words 'determine' and 'examine'. Most learners pronounced the words */'dɪtə:main/ and */'ɪgʒəmain/ instead of /di'tɪ:mi:n/

and /ig'zæmin/ respectively.

Those types of pronunciation errors occurred regularly almost every time the writer heard many of the learners pronounced the words. The writer often corrected the incorrect pronunciation after the learners finished presenting their summary, but it was not easy for them to pronounce the words correctly when they encountered the same words to pronounce.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

Based on the theoretical background and the result of observation above the writer concludes that the inaccurate pronunciation of the English of the seventh semester students of the English department of Atma Jaya University is a natural one from the point of view of SLA.

Selinker (1972) in Cook (1994) in the second paragraph of the introduction of this paper stated that "L2 learning differs from first language acquisition in that it is seldom successful; 5 percent of L2 learners have 'absolute success' in his view and the other 95 per cent learners are less successful in learning the L2. This statement is true to the pronunciation performance of the English learners of the students observed above. The writer is almost sure that 5 per cent or more learners perform the English and especially the English pronunciation perfectly and the other 95 per cent of the students perform their English differently.

It is also concluded that the incorrect pronunciation of the learners should not be considered as something that are not allowed to occur but should be realized as something natural. That is the pronunciation of the language learners that is neither the pronunciation of the L1 nor that of the L2, the pronunciation specific of the learners. Thus, the possibility of the pronunciation ranges between L1 through L2.

From the point of view of the factors affecting the learners' pronunciation, the writer observes that the pronunciation specific of the learners is mostly as a result of overgeneralization of the kind of rules of pronouncing the words like the incorrect pronunciation of the word 'determine' and 'examine' above. That is because the learners probably overgeneralize the pronunciation of the word 'mine' /main/. Very few errors are as

a result of L1 transfer such as the inaccurate pronunciation of the words 'doubt' */doub/ and 'debt' */deb/.

SUGGESTION

Based on the theory and observation above the writer suggests that both the teacher and learners realize their positions. The teacher should realize that such incorrect pronunciation is natural and so he should treat the learners naturally by correcting their errors at the right moment, for example after the learners finish their presentation. In order to give enough exposure of the correct pronunciation to the learners the teacher himself should give good examples of the pronunciation of the words. Further the teacher should encourage the learners to listen to the native speakers speaking, for example, by watching films or news broadcasts in English.

The learners should pay attention to the teachers' correction and should practice the pronunciation correctly. In addition to that the writer suggests that the learners check the correct pronunciation in the dictionary in case they are not sure about the pronunciation of certain words. If they are unable to pronounce the words accurately, they should not feel discouraged. The motivation to be able to pronounce the words correctly should not stop even though in reality, for example, the learners are unable to pronounce those words as expected.

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