

Research on Pronunciation Teaching of English Major in Minority Areas of Yunnan from the Perspective of Transfer Theory

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Keywords: transfer, minority area, pronunciation

Abstract: Currently, there are 2 billion people learning English in the whole world, therefore, English has become one of the most widely-used languages in the world. Mastering English means obtaining rich global information directly and more opportunities to speak to the whole world. Therefore, learning English has become the important part of global education courses. Wherein, primary school is the enlightenment stage for English learning, accordingly, its importance is needless to say. The objective of English course in the primary school stage is to cultivate good English learning habit of students, make them have positive emotions, strengthen their language sense, make them form correct pronunciation and intonation in order to lay a solid foundation for them in further learning. Therefore, pronunciation teaching is very important in the primary stage of English learning.

1. Introduction

Under the backgrounds of reform and opening-up as well as Great Western Development Strategy, English has become one of the important languages for the national minorities in our country to conduct external communication and learning in the process of economic development. However, owing to restriction of the special territories, cultures and economies in national minorities, English education faces inherent defect and acquired barrier. The minority students are affected by multiple factors in English learning, such as backgrounds of mother language and Chinese, learning motivation, learning strategy, multicultural environment and individual difference of learners, which causes formation of distinct characteristics in English learning. The middle schools and primary schools in the minority areas of Yunnan have already set English course, but they still have large gap from developed areas in English education level, wherein, these minority students have weak foundation and most of them can not keep up with the teaching schedule, who are the main groups to fail in exams and entering a higher school. Owing to the special cultural background of the minority areas of Yunnan and corresponding language transfer, the minority students are facing many special barriers in English learning, for primary school students, the largest barrier is pronunciation learning, wherein, pronunciation is the starting point and basis for language learning, and has important influence on English word memorizing, listening improvement, oral English improvement, reading capacity and interest enhancement.

2. Language transfer

The works *Language Transfer: Cross-linguistic Influence in Language Learning* is recognized to be the most authoritative and representative works, which was written by famous American linguist Odlin in 1989, who thinks transfer is caused from similarity and difference between the previously-existing language (mastered or learnt in mistakes) and currently-learning language. In other words, transfer may be the influence of mastered languages of the learner on the new language. Language transfer doesn't just involve the influence of language itself (such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and meaning), which also includes the influence of some other factors (such as way of thinking, cultural tradition and social history).

The second language transfer theory researchers' analyses on the data of mother language structure and form in the target language further explain language transfer which includes two

forms, namely, positive transfer and negative transfer. Specifically, the transfer caused from common point between the mother language and target language is called as “positive transfer”, namely the language habit of the mother language is applied into the target language correctly. When the learners apply the mother language into the target language improperly, “negative transfer” will appear, namely mother language interference. In the negative transfer, the mother language will cause mistakes.

3. Current situation of pronunciation teaching

3.1 Pronunciation

“Learning pronunciation is helpful for students in pronouncing, listening and word memorizing“, “only when you learn pronunciation well can other people understand what you have said“. When one word is taught, the students will connect the English pronunciation with the pronunciation of their familiar native language, meanwhile, they will make marks on books. Some students will whisper and titter when they hear some English words or sentences, such as the word Table, some of the students will titter, because its pronunciation is similar to the vulgar mother. Some teachers think native language has a positive influence on English learning. In classroom, the students will think it is interesting to learn the English words with similar pronunciation with the native language, some underachievers will devote themselves to English learning with interest accordingly, similar and same pronunciation will help the students to memorize English words. However, though the local teachers think the native language will affect the learning of English pronunciation, the influence is just a little. While the foreign teachers think the influence is large and they find intonation and word order are also affected by the native language besides the pronunciation, sometimes the word order of native language will be used for the students to understand the English word order.

3.2 Pronunciation difficulty

“Pronunciation is the foundation of English learning, if the students can not learn pronunciation well, they will not keep up with the teaching schedule thus to affect their ability in comprehensive application of language and improvement in learning ability“. The following pronunciations are difficult for the students, including /r/, /θ/, /ŋ/, /ð/, /l/, /j/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /f/, /v/, /tr/ and /dr/, for example, 98% of the students will pronounce red to be /led/, can not differ the voiceless consonants from voiced consonants, when they read the words with the endings of /k/, /t/, /g/, /d/, /p/ and /b/, they get used to adding one vowel, such as pronounce friend to be /frendə/; besides, they are easy to pronounce /s/ to be /t/, don’t understand the shape of the mouth for the pronunciation /θ/ and they are easy to mix /θ/ and /s/; one experienced teacher finds that the students don’t master the skills in correct pronunciation well.

3.3 Imbalanced economic development

Owing to the backward economy in minority areas of Yunnan, the English teaching level is also affected. The English teaching equipment in schools is poor and the teachers’ ability is low. Though the local teachers know the concept and requirement of the new curriculum reform, owing to the poor learning situation as well as weak awareness in English learning and insufficient learning capacity of the students, they still play the role of imparting knowledge in classroom teaching. Most teachers only pay attention to word and grammar teaching but neglect the basic English pronunciation.

4. Countermeasures to improve the English pronunciation teaching in minority areas of Yunnan

4.1 Suggestions for the students on pronunciation learning

(1) Make imitation based on comprehension, combine mechanical practice with meaningful

practice

In the pronunciation learning process, many students will imitate for pronunciation learning, which is a good method for beginners. According to investigation, more than half of the students learn pronunciation through imitation, but the teachers find that the students can not grasp the main points in pronunciation learning. Unapprehensive imitation just represents similar pronunciation, but as time goes on, the students are easy to mix the pronunciation and will fail to use correct intonation in different language environments. Therefore, imitation should base on comprehension understanding. In face of deep-rooted influence of native language, mechanical repeat is also necessary, which can change the habit of mother language. And only in this way can the students form permanent memory.

(2) Formulate the plan for pronunciation learning

Pronunciation is the most basic part in language learning, which can not be enhanced in short time. Formulating a plan for pronunciation learning can make the students plan the time consciously and learn pronunciation more effectively. Before this, the teachers need to know the pronunciation basis of each student and recognize their cognition styles, and accordingly, they can help the students to establish a learning objective, training method and suitable learning strategy according to their actual situations, if necessary, they need to make demonstration and explain for the students. For the students, persistence is very important.

4.2 Suggestions for the teachers

(1) Strengthen positive transfer and avoid negative transfer

Though the teachers have noticed the influence of mother language transfer, in the teaching and learning processes, the teachers and the students don't pay much attention to pronunciation. Pronunciation learning is a long-time task, the teachers might as well penetrate pronunciation teaching into various aspects of English learning and strengthen pronunciation transfer teaching to avoid bad influence of negative transfer. For example, the teachers can guide the students to listen to the rhythm of English pronunciation, compare the difference among native language, Mandarin and English intonation thus to help the students to strengthen interest in pronunciation learning.

(2) Promote self-directed professional development of the teachers

Professional development of the teachers refers to the process for continuous improvement and development of the teachers in professional idea, professional knowledge and ability. The self-directed professional development requires the teachers to present their awareness in self-directed professional development and corresponding behaviors, that is a kind of professional development mode for the teachers basing on the requirement on self-development and school development to determine the development objective, explore and take advantage of various learning opportunities and resources, select suitable professional contents for learning, monitor their professional development and evaluate the learning result. Such kind of self-development process is mainly presented in continuous examination, criticism and reflection of the teachers in teaching practices. Therefore, the local English teachers should firstly enhance their English level through self-learning. For instance, the teachers can rely on mobile phone software and network video to correct their pronunciation and really pay attention to pronunciation teaching, only when the teachers have good pronunciation foundation can they organize English teaching properly, build good English atmosphere and make the students obtain more learning and practice opportunities in classroom. Besides, the teachers can also take English level exams such as Shanghai Interpretation, TOEIC and PETS thus to push themselves in English learning. In daily life, they should also read related literatures about English teaching in minority areas, know the latest theory and teaching research, learn scientific research methods, give play to the role of teacher research in order to find out and solve problems by themselves.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the teachers should strengthen pronunciation transfer teaching, penetrate pronunciation teaching into daily teaching, guide the students in self-learning and center on

cultivating independent spelling and reading abilities of the students. Besides, the teachers should teach the students to learn instead of paying attention only to knowledge impairment, guide them to learn meaningfully, make them master the memory method and realize meaningful memory. In the pronunciation teaching process, the teachers should combine with the psychological characteristics of the students in minority areas of Yunnan to treat the mistakes of the students correctly, eliminate their psychological barriers and motivate their interest in learning. Furthermore, the teachers should adjust the teaching method timely according to the actual requirements of the students, avoid following the popular teaching method but find out the suitable method for the students.

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