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Ciluba Speaking Learners' Interference in Sound Production

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Abstract

This study addresses interference produced by Cilubà speaking learners in their English learning process in the classroom (in some schools of Mbujimayi). It aims at providing some hints which are likely to help overcome such difficulties of language learners use English with some connected speech sounds. Observation and questionnaires (interviews) are approaches used to collect and interpret the data. After investigation, the study has proved that there are three types of sounds interference learners' levels, namely grouped as Higher interference users (75% of 80 learners observed); Intermediate level learners (36% of 125 learners observed); and Advanced level learners (25% of 42 learners observed).

Some remedies should be taken into consideration like, intensification of reading tasks, the allotment of more time to oral tasks than to written ones by making learners talk more and more, the focus on learners' pronunciation problems for some items containing complex vowel sounds, training learners how to discriminate sounds they cross enough difficulties, and helping them to have more practice on spelling exercises.

Key words: *Interference, sound production, foreign language learning.*

1. Introduction

After some years of teaching English as a *foreign* language in some Mbujimayi schools, I have noticed that many learners are mispronouncing some English words. Therefore, this paper investigates some English sounds produced by Cilubà speaking learners while learning English in the classroom. In it, I am going to sort out different kinds of interferences and point out their sources and provide some bits of solutions to errors generation as well.

2. Some Types And Sources Of Interference

2.1. What is Interference?

Learning English as a foreign language generates different kinds of errors. These errors may be due to a miss-transfer of target materials into English on different aspects such as grammar, spelling, sounds, vocabulary, and the like.

The word 'interference' comes from the verb 'interfere', meaning 'to get involved in and try to influence a situation that does not concern you, in a way that annoys other people (Hornby 2015). Likewise, *interfere with something* is to prevent it from succeeding or being done or happen as planned.' Accordingly, '*language interference*' is considered as one of error sources (negative transfer), it results from incorrect language production, that is, positive transfer. Siding with Newmark (cited in Corder, 1981:99), interference is simply seen as the result of a performer being called upon to perform before s/he has learned the new behavior. He adds that 'the result is 'padding,'' using old knowledge, supplying what is known to make up for what is unknown.

Applied to the use of English sounds, most learners use English sounds in the wrong way when learning English, because they immediately refer back to the materials available in their first language. As these learners feel indebted to relate the knowledge (sounds) they have in their first language to that/those they are learning. Once this relation fails, then interference is likely to occur. Interference affects many

aspects of the language viz. grammar, vocabulary, accent, spelling… For instance, mostly Cilubà speakers utter the sound [ti:ʧə] as *[ʧi:ʧə] as they feel that their Cilubà initial sound [ʧ] is the same as the English one [t]. Thus, once produced, the error is likely to occur in English.

2.2. Types of Interference

Concerning interference levels, they have been ranked into two main categories including the *productive interference,* the one related to the addresser(speaker) and the *perceptive/receptive interference,* that related to the addressee (listener). In here, I use 'productive interference' with reference to different traits visibly observed on the part of EFLL (English as a Foreign Language Learner), that is, those based on phonology (particularly at the early stages of learning) the phonological distance (differences observed in pronunciation) between English and Cilubà, and vice versa. It is worth noting that the traits above play an important role in determining accuracy of EFLLP (English as a Foreign Language Learner's Pronunciation).

On his part, Biselela (2015) stipulates that 'phonology seems to be the one most easily and frequently interfered with, and productive interference, the most investigated.' Therefore, an English learner may realize the item 'Mister' as *[mɪst] simply because the final vowel sound [ə] does not go with Cilubà language system. Equally, Ellis (1986:22) says '…where the first and second languages share a meaning but express it in different ways, an error is likely to arise in the **L2** because the learner will transfer the realization device from his first language into the second language.'

Corder (1981:97) proves the following:

> …particularly in the early stages of learning as might be predicted, a greater degree of mother tongue features in the learner's interlanguage performance (hereinafter 'interference errors') are to be found.

He also adds that:

> …'interference errors' in their speech and the amount of 'interference' varies considerably and unpredictably from learner to learner even under similar conditions of learning.'

As I pointed out some facts above, phonological interferences are dominant for the beginners learning EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Therefore, their intensity decreases in the long run on the part of the learner.

With reference to 'perceptive interference,' I consider whatever material, mechanism, object, sound, and the like the EFLL hears, listens to and comprehends. The one s/he will later on turn into productive when confronted in the communication situation. For instance, a learner who has been taught by someone with imperfect knowledge of English, who has passed on his/her own mistakes to the new learner, especially in pronunciation and intonation, will likely have to produce the same wrong language.

Receptive/perceptive and productive interferences are closely related in so far as the learner cannot produce materials s/he has never perceived or heard. Perceptive interference is less evident, less visible even less investigated than the productive one. Hence, productive interference shows clear manifestations in the use of the language in terms of its aspects as semantics, phonology, grammar, morphology, and so on.

For Biselela (2015), 'although some trials have been made to study perceptive interference, it appears that it involves such huge funding that, in the end, the investigation is judged not to be worthwhile.' Corder (1981:75) asserts that '…the learner may utilize at least two interlanguage grammars, one for productive use and one for receptive use.' It is clear to notice that both productive and receptive interferences are interdependently used.

As a matter of course, an interference is called ‘perceptive/receptive in case it involves mostly the ‘learning skill,’ and this is felt difficult to assess. In this way, Lamérand (1969:11) says that:

> L’acquisition des structures grammaticales mettra l’élève en mesure de rendre un texte de sa langue maternelle en langue étrangère, tandis que l’acquisition des idiotismes, en tant que comportement verbal, le mettra en mesure de déchiffrer un texte de langue étrangère à l’audition ou à la lecture, tout comme en maniant les structures de la langue parlée et écrite.

In other terms, the learner produces materials s/he hears from other people, that is, s/he may wrongly use utterances s/he has heard in one language and transfer them into the language s/he is learning. These wrong utterances can impact negatively the foreign language and result in errors. For instance, the learner, in the reading lesson can hear sequences of utterances containing diphthong sounds and rend them in a different and strange way. ‘*My trousers are dirtied by iron*.’ [*mɪ 'trʊsərs ɑ: 'də:tɪed bi: ɪrən].

Most learners interfere with diphthong sounds in English by the fact that complex sounds do not exist in Cilubà.

Lamérand (1969:14) also adds:

> L’identification des sons d’une langue étrangère, telle qu’elle est parlée, implique tout d’abord la perception des différences de niveaux des phénomènes entre la langue maternelle et la langue-cible. Les différences les plus sensibles seront les plus faciles à percevoir. Certaines difficultés se présenteront pour les phénomènes qui se différencient que très faiblement de ceux de la langue maternelle…l’attention de l’élève sera attirée sur les juxtapositions de sons qui ne lui sont pas familiers.

This what he calls ‘la compréhension auditive,’ a faculty that involves a complex phenomenon denoting the ability of identifying lexical items, accents, intonation that build up the foreign language system. In my view, I look at perceptive interference as including aural features from the language the EFL feels home with, and uses them in a wrong way because his/her hypotheses about the target language are still based on his/her limited experience.

Nur’ahdiani (2020:10) asserts that ‘Native language interference is crucial in second language since it is the major source of errors in second language learning…the production of English sounds is one of English language elements which is often interfered with by the learners’ native language.’ As said above, the production of English sounds by learners speaking Cilubà is wrongly performed especially in the early stage of learning because of the influence of the learners’ mother tongue.

2.3. Sources of Interference

Interferences result from many sources including the learners’ multilingualism background, this is the major cause of interference since the learner is influenced mostly by his/her first language sounds, especially in the early stage of learning. For instance, the wrong use of complex English sounds as the latter are not frequent in Cilubà.

2.4. Disloyalty to foreign language

Learners deviate from the English language internal structure with regard to its grammar, vocabulary, phonology, thus they create a strange structure because of the insufficiency of their target language knowledge, especially in speaking. Similarly, Kellerman (cited in Corder, 1981:96) shows that ‘learners have about the transferability of the forms of their mother tongue into the second language performance.’ That is to say learners whose language background of target language is limited come to put words in sentences or utter them orally in their mother tongue-like features.

Moreover, the limited vocabulary of TL mastered by the learner is also regarded as causing oral interference to occur. The Cilubà speaking learner of English has less exposure to the language under study. Therefore, s/he comes across new items s/he will be compelled to use to convey a message. Reason why, as the vocabulary mastery of the learner is still insufficient, most of the time the learner will have to resort to use the materials which are available in his/her L1. Hence, s/he will likely make errors in a great number. For instance, learners make errors in sound production as in 'ouch!' [aʊʧ] is produced as *[aʊʃ].

According to Richards (1974), 'students who live in a country where English is taught as a foreign language, obviously do not have adequate time of exposure.' He also adds that 'consequently, when a student has a limited exposure to the language learned, it is possible for him/her to make errors in all aspects of the language. In other words, the less the learner is exposed to the foreign language, the worse s/he is going to master it.

Another cause of oral interferences is the prestige and style of both the speaker and the listener. Learners mostly use items which are unfamiliar to them. These unfamiliar items (sounds) usage aims at getting a pride, that is, the prestige which will engender error between languages involved.

In short, learners prefer to use some items to impede their addressees' understanding simply to impress them and the usual foreign items usage will become a style of the language user. As the learner does not understand the real meaning of the code, as a result, s/he will produce wrong structures in the language s/he is using.

Oral-aural errors have also overgeneralization as source especially in the use of some close sounds as [i:] in 'read', 'speak', 'teach', and [e] as in 'break' and 'spread'. Learners have problems discriminating this couple of sounds ([i:] ≠ [e] with initial and final consonant sounds. Some learners realize 'Paul speaks French' as [pɔ:l *speks frenʧ] instead of [pɔ:l spi:ks frenʧ]. Similarly with 'break' [*bri:k] instead of [brek] as illustrated above.

I side with Richards (1974:174) when he says, 'overgeneralization covers instances where the learner creates deviant structure on the basis of his experience of the other structures in TL.'

Let us now consider the Medium transfer as another cause of learners' oral-aural errors. In English language learning, 'Medium transfer' refers to the learner's undue reliance on either the spoken or the written form of a word when the other medium is being used. In this paper, I focus on the spoken form of materials. This can occur under two perspectives, namely (1) if the learner pronounces an item according to its spelling, and then the medium transfer is likely to occur. For instance, lift [lift], God [gɔd], smell [smel]; and (2) if the learner spells the word according to its pronunciation, the medium transfer is also going to occur. This is illustrated below.

Spelling	**Pronunciation/Sounds**
* Rayter / Raïter	['raɪtə]
* Brader / *Braver / *Brather	['brʌðə]
* Fraïdy	[fraɪdɪ]

Note that in (1) the learner might realize linguistic items considering units of sounds, especially the vowel ones. As 'lift' can be realized as *[laɪft] because the learner is able to realize that, the sound [aɪ] is different from the letter script /i/. Wherever the learner notices the letter /i/ can pronounce it as the sound [aɪ].

3. Methods

I have used observation and questionnaires as to gather data for this paper. That is, I combined different techniques and approaches including library research—that allowed me to read books, to computer download other materials and sources) and field research—the one which allowed me to have a face-to-face conversation with my learners in order to get more details about my study). I also resorted to

psycholinguistic approach, that is, I have considered real language my learners used in the classroom context and deduced conclusions about how they produced wrongly English sounds while talking and discussing on different topics.

I assigned different tasks (as shown on the appended sample hereafter) to learners such as spelling words, listening exercises, and reading tasks focusing of some items containing sounds under investigation: [ʧ], [ʃ], [θ], [ð], [v], [i:], [ɪ], [ə], [d].

As for the sampling, I selected different learners I grouped differently for discussions on the topic; that is the stratified sample is used in this article. I had three groups of learners, that is, lower level learners, made of 80 learners from 7th and 8th; the second group is that of intermediate level learners made of 125 learners from 1st and 2nd; and the last group of advanced level learners made of 42 learners from 3rd and 4th at secondary school.

With regard to the analysis of data, I have used qualitative research throughout this investigation. First, I looked at how well learners use language to convey meanings. Here I focused on specific sounds production by Cilubà speaking learners facing oral-aural interferences in English. For instance, the realization of [θ] as *[f], and [ð] as [d,v] by some EFLL (English as an Foreign Language Learners), and the omission of complex sounds namely, [aʊ], [aɪ], [eɪ], and [aʊə] by learners. The qualitative research and the psychoanalytic method helped me to interpret the level of sound production problems in this paper. The computation of results and the statistical scale of the final findings helped also in this work.

4. Results

I have noticed that results must be presented into three categories of learners using interferences while speaking, as it will be shown later in this section.

(1) **Lower Level Learners (3L's)**: This category of learners refers to those who are at their very beginning of the foreign language learning process. In this group, I have noticed (75%) of learner with higher interference use, that is 60 learners out of 80 observed. For instance, [ŋk, f, v, d] are realized by most learners. As in 'meeting' *['mi:tınk] instead of ['mi:tıŋ]; 'bathroom' *['bæfru:m] instead of ['bæθru:m]; 'there' *['deə] instead of [ðeə] or *[veə] instead of [ðeə].

Table 1.

Sounds	Frequencies	Percent
/f, v, d/ ≠ /θ, ð/	60	75
/ʧ/ ≠ /t/	15	18.75
/nk/ ≠ /ŋ/	5	6.25
Total	**80**	**100**

(2) **Intermediate Level Learners (ILL's)**: This group includes only a small number of learners facing oral-aural interference problems. That is, those omitting complex sounds and substituting them for the simple ones. For example, *[ɪ] used for [aɪ] as in 'time' *[tım], 'fine' *[fın]; *[e] used for [eɪ or i:] as in 'name' *[nem or næm], 'eat' *[et], *[ɒ/ʊ] used for [aʊ] as in 'outside' *[ɒtsɪd/ʊtsɪd].

In the above category, the elements I have identified result from the learners' mother tongue. That is, these elements are absent in the learners' mother tongue. Hence, they transfer the sounds available in Cilubà into English. This category includes 36% of learners on the 125 observed.

Table 2.

Sounds	Frequencies	Percent
/ɔ, ʊ/ ≠ /aʊ/	45	36
/ɪ/ ≠ /aɪ/	80	64
Total	**125**	**100**

(3) **Advanced Level Learners (ALL's)**: They have lower interferences in their sound production. This category involves 25% of learners using interferences, that is 10 learners out of 42 observed. This means that, at this stage, learners use interference at the lowest degree. And in the long run, it sensibly decreases because learners have accumulated a great number of foreign language materials.

(4)

Table 3.

Sounds	**Frequencies**	**Percent**
/θ, ð/ ≠ /f, v, d/	10	25
	32	75
Total	**42**	**100**

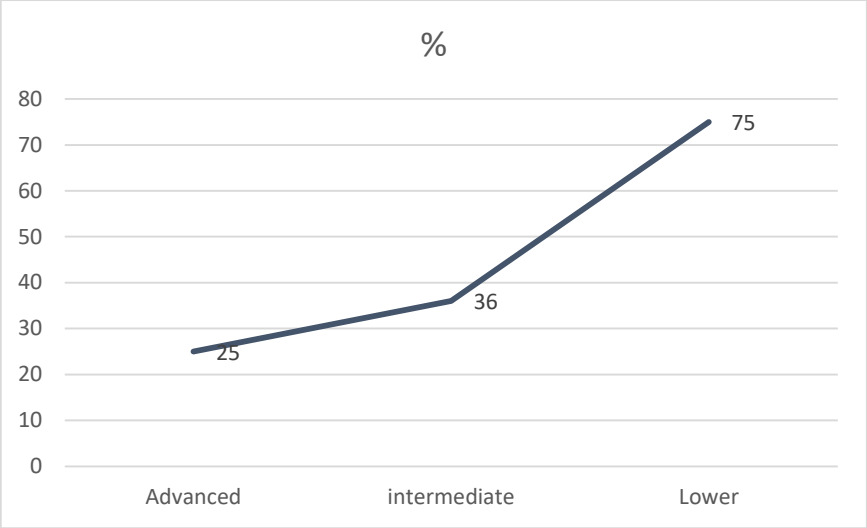
Here I have used some exercises from International curriculum: Intermediate grammar (ABC International). The answers are shown in the table below with frequencies and percent altogether. I have stratified the questionnaire as follows:

N°	**FREQUENCIES/25**	**PERCENT**
A.	16	64
	1	4
	2	8
	2	8
	4	16
B.	19	76
	1	4
	4	16
	1	4
	0	0
C.	1	4
	4	16
	6	24
	6	24
	8	32
D.	16	64
	1	4
	6	24
	4	16
	1	4

Table of mixed levels

N°	**Levels**	**%**
1	*Lower Level Learners*	75
2	*Intermediate Level Learners*	36
3	*Advanced Level Learners*	25

The scaled schema below streamlines the results above per level.



5. Suggestions

As I have noticed in the results above, learners' pronunciation problems rely on the insufficient materials in the foreign language. Cilubà speaking learners' interferences are not to be avoided in all, but they must train their learners' listening and speaking abilities devising the following classroom activities.

(1) Intensify reading tasks, and allot more time to oral tasks than to written ones.
(2) Make learners talk more and more.
(3) Focus on learners' pronunciation problems, especially for items containing complex vowel sounds such as [aɪ], [ɪə], [eə], [eɪ].
(4) Train learners how to discriminate sounds they cross enough difficulties. For instance, [θ, ð] and [f, v, d].
(5) Help learners to have more practice on spelling exercises for items containing some sounds containing problems.
(6) Involve learners in discussions on the topic they have more interest (e.g. Football Match, Travel).
(7) Train learners to identify various symbols that stand for specify sounds; and combine them with items having these sounds. For instance, [θ] is found in 'both', 'something', 'clothes'…

6. Conclusion

This article has discussed different levels of interferences Cilubà speaking learners use when learning English as a foreign language in the classroom. Although it has pointed out different aspects in which these interferences affect in English, the chief concern has been that of sounds production; that is 'speaking' ability.

To put it otherwise, interference occur most of the time when Cilubà speaking learners borrow sounds from their L1 to use them in English. When these materials sound different from those available in English, the phonology of English is therefore distorted and even inappropriate to the hearer. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the fact that their motor commands (their control over larynx, pharynx, and articulators) have been conditioned for years by first language pronunciation.

In my observation, the sound pattern is more affected than others because listening and speaking are the initial stage of using any language, be it the mother tongue or the *foreign* one. For instance, sounds such as [θ] and [ð] are realized in different ways by a Cilubà speaking learner learning English as [f] and [v, d] or [t]. *They came to see their father* is realized as *[dei keim tu si: deə fædə] or *[vei keim tu si: veə fædə]. Similarly, the English utterance '*He thought to bring me something*' is mostly realized as *[hi fɔ:t tu *brink mi *sʌmfink]. The asterisk shows that the sound is wrongly produced.

Another set of problems relies on the production of complex sounds, namely diphthongs and triphthongs in English. For instance, 'I go out' can be realized [aɪ *gɔ *ʊt], and 'He was proud of his beautiful ears' as *[hɪ wɔz *prʊd ɔv hiz *bɔ:tifʊl *əz].

Throughout my study, I have noticed that many learners have problems to rend the English sounds [θ, ð] appropriately. Hence, they transfer their Cilubà-like features [f] for [θ], and [v, d] for [ð] simply because [θ, ð] are not attested in Cilubà. Still, some other learners restrict complex sounds use to the simple sounds. That is, sounds such as [aʊ, eɪ and aɪ] are realized as [ɒ/ʊ, e/æ and ɪ] in English. This occurs for the simple reason that learners do not have diphthongs and triphthongs in Cilubà. Thus, they resort to materials they find easier in Cilubà and use them in English.

Furthermore, the scaled schema has stratified interference users into (1) Higher Interference Users, that is, learners who are still at the very beginning of their learning. Results have showed that these learners use interference at the highest grade. (2) Intermediate Level Learners, that is, those in between the lower level and the advanced level. This category moderates the degree of interference; and (3) Advanced Level Learners, that is, the learners who have achieved a great command of English. Hence, they use interference at the lowest degree.

Finally, my suggestions include guidelines for the teacher to develop on the part of the learner so as to reduce the burden of language errors while communicating.

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Appendix

Students' Questionnaire

N°	QUESTIONS	PROPOSED ANSWERS				
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
A.	Read the items and tick the one which contains the sound /θ/ and /ð/	Throw/Catch	Teach/There	Brother/Oath	That/Close	Search/Cough
B.	Which of the following pairs contains /ɔ ; ʊ/	Chalk/But	Son/Come	But/Hot	Foot/Full	Good/God
C.	Read these words and underline those which contain the sound /θ, ð/	Though/Taught	Teacher/Brother	Breathe/That	Their/Anything	Either/Father
D.	The item which contains the sound /f, v/ is	Tea/Sea	That/Thing	Drive/Thought	Die/Red	Clever/Enough
E.	Which of the following words is difficult to pronounce?	Go	Have	Ride	Kid	Taught