

Pronunciation Problems in French: A Case Study of First Year Students at University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

Chandeeda Gunawardena

The present research, a case study, analyzes pronunciation problems encountered by First year students of French at University of Kelaniya. The study is based on the assumption that the pronunciation errors were systematic and did not occur randomly and they reflect the interference of the different prosodic patterns of the learners' native language. Data were collected at three occasions when the present researcher worked as a lecturer in 2012. First, following the contrastive analysis hypothesis, potential pronunciation difficulties were identified and then the contrastive analysis hypothesis was validated by the error analysis. The informants used for this study were 20 undergraduates who were at the time of the study studying French as a foreign language in the first year at University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. They were chosen using random sampling method. All participants had a homogenous linguistic background. All subjects had completed their secondary education in Sinhala medium and during which they had also learnt French. A battery operated audio tape recorder and a 120-minute blank cassettes were used for recording. A list comprised of 150 words representing all French phonemes was used to diagnose pronunciation difficulties. The recording was conducted individually in the faculty language lab and each recording approximately took ten/fifteen minutes. After the completion of recording, the recordings were replayed to identify common errors which were immediately transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet. The errors were classified into four categories; developmental errors, interference errors, fossilized errors and unique errors. The findings revealed that the majority of the errors were interference errors related to French vowels and initial clusters. The fundamental errors showed that similarities between languages do not always facilitate the language acquisition. The findings of the research will be important to teachers, students, curriculum designers, policy makers and other fellow researchers in Sri Lanka.

Key words: case study, errors, French, pronunciation, Sinhala