

Cooperative and Collaborative Language Learning: An action Plan

Rohini Chandrica Widyalkara *

*English Language Teaching Unit, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

Abstract- The spread of World Englishes has generated a need for maximizing intelligibility in speech discourse. Yet in current pedagogy teaching pronunciation is a much neglected area. In the Sri Lankan context deviations from Standard Sri Lankan English pronunciation, especially in segmental phonology, results in impairing intelligibility even amongst the local interlocutors.

Utilizing the limited technology available this study constructs a short term Action Plan based on the tenets of cooperative and collaborative learning to address two selected pronunciation deviations: the nondifferentiation between /ʃ/ and /s/ and confusion of /p/ and /f/ in 20 undergraduate users of learner English. The Action Plan informs practitioners of Teaching English as a Second Language on implementing short courses which benefit learners who deviate from inner circle pronunciation.

Index Terms- intelligibility, segmental phonology, cooperative and collaborative learning, Rapid Learning Centers

I. INTRODUCTION

Dooly (2008: 21)^[1] states that 'in the cooperative model of learning, the teacher controls most of what is going on in the class, even if the students are working in groups. Collaborative learning, on the other hand, is aimed at getting the students to take almost full responsibility for working together, building knowledge together, changing and evolving together and of course, improving together'. Combining these two modes the Action Plan of this study investigates the outcome of the combination: Cooperative and Collaborative Learning. Thus it has two composites teacher controlled group work and collaborative language learning where the responsibility for learning shifts to the student. It is an interactive team process where the main stakeholders: the teacher and the students support and rely on each other to achieve the goals set down by a course. Thus the commitment to achieve the goal is a shared responsibility demanded from each stakeholder and learning moves away from the traditional teacher centered dissemination of knowledge.

Down the ages scholars (Bejarano, 1987^[2]; Kreie et al., 2007^[3]; McGroarty, 1993^[4]; Sachs et al., 2003^[5]) have stated that student participation in group work following cooperative methods weans them from depending on a teacher as the sole source of knowledge and understanding. Furthermore it grants the teacher an opportunity to provide the weaker students with one-on-one tutoring while the stronger students involve in cognitive rehearsal. Moreover these scholars concur that both cooperative and collaborative learning facilitate second language

acquisition, improve learner retention and equal participation during group work hones individual accountability and positive interdependence.

II. RESEARCH ELABORATION

There are two main divisions in the dialectal taxonomy of Sri Lankan English (SLE) pronunciation: Standard Sri Lankan English (SSLE) and Other Varieties of SLE which are considered learner varieties. The diversity of these varieties of SLE is more robustly evidenced in the segmental more than the supra segmental. The target population undergraduates of a university in Sri Lanka fall under the latter speech community. Thus it is a dire necessity for these students, educated but a socially stigmatized group as pronunciation brands them as users of a non inner circle variety, to upgrade their pronunciation.

Furthermore pronunciation teaching has been a neglected area in our school ESL classrooms. Thus when these students enter the university, they find loud reading problematic, are hesitant and tend to proceed along a grapheme to phoneme conversion mode. They can form short sentences but non adherence to pronunciation norms in these two areas are so fossilized that very often the undergraduates do not perceive that they deviate from codified norms of SSLE.

1.1 Challenge to be resolved

Empirical investigation (Widyalkara, 2014)^[6] provides evidence that the selected two features of this study given below have a high frequency of occurrence and impact on intelligibility of pronunciation in Sinhala/learner English bilinguals in Sri Lanka.

- a) Indiscriminate use of /ʃ/ and /s/
- b) Confusing /p/ and /f/

This is due to the influence of the language specific markedness constraint ranking of their L1 Sinhala where /f/ is an alien phoneme resulting in confusion between /p/ and /f/ and/or overuse of /f/. Sinhala is a diglossic language. The grapheme for /ʃ/ in Sinhala is habitually pronounced as /s/ in speech. Furthermore free variation between /ʃ/ and /s/ is permitted in Written Sinhala resulting in further confusion of the phonemes. Thus the weak bilingual transfers the indiscriminate use of /ʃ/ and /s/ to their English pronunciation. This issue needs resolving before these students graduate as the lack of intelligibility in their pronunciation will jeopardize opportunities in employment. But the following challenges within the existing ESL environment have to be addressed to fulfill this endeavor.

- a) Lack of collaborative work