

English Phonological De-fossilization Study

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Abstract. Phonological fossilization is an obvious shortcoming of oral English. Most wrongly pronounced sound elements are easily fossilized but hard to be De-fossilized, the paper shows the methods to find out how to De-fossilize in the pronunciation of the foreign language learning in China and demonstrate the effectiveness through case study.

Keywords: De-fossilization; English; Case study.

1. Introduction

The fossilized pronunciation errors constitute a great problem in the mastery of TL in second or foreign language learning and teaching (Odlin 1989; Johnson, 2001; Demirezen, 2003; Demirezen, 2004). It is the teacher's role as a trainer to tackle students' fossilized sound elements and as a guide to inspire them and develop their autonomy in pronunciation practice.

2. Studies of Language Fossilization Abroad

The interactional model was proposed by Vigil and Oller (1976: 281-295). In this model, it is conversational interaction that determines whether a component of the learner's interlanguage system will cause fossilization or lead to progress towards L2. Vigil and Oller (1976) explain language fossilization in terms of positive and negative affective and cognitive feedback. Various combinations of the two major types of feedback are possible. Vigil and Oller observe that negative affective feedback, regardless of the degree of cognitive feedback, will likely discourage the learner.

3. Studies of Language Fossilization in China

Research reveals that quite a few Chinese scholars tend to equal "plateau" or "stabilization" in target language learning with the phenomenon of temporary fossilization. If the learners involved in this stage and can't make any further development in their interlanguage, permanent fossilization occurs. And if the learners involved make a breakthrough in their interlanguage by further study, permanent fossilization is avoided. Therefore, much of their works cover the field of preventing permanent fossilization.

Most of the studies on language fossilization in China are based on the theories of foreign experts. However, there is still something new in their research, that is, the combination of those theories and the situation of foreign language teaching and learning in China.

4. A De-fossilizing Case Study of Chinese College Students

To De-fossilize Student A and B's fossilized sound elements, the De-fossilizing procedure is carefully designed by the author as of nine operational steps. Two students are chosen from freshmen in Chemical department of Beihua University in 2017. What's more, the experiment was lasted for 9 months. Student A is given phonetic-phonological remedial class twice a week, and his readings are recorded once a week. While student B is from the same class, whose English teacher is the same and their marks in the college entrance examination is close to each other. There are no De-fossilizing procedures to student B but normal English class from the author.

5. De-fossilizing Procedures

5.1 Warm up and Motivation

Go over what is learnt in previous class, especially some difficult points, and chat with the student in simple everyday English. Thus he will do better than before and be motivated during which we will figure out the fossilized sound elements and crack them one by one. The author will not impose the student to correct all the fossilized elements perceived at this step. A pleasure and reassuring atmosphere is to be established.

5.2 Present New Materials

Learn to pronounce new words and read aloud the text containing these new words. At earlier stage, attention is paid to the fossilized segmentals. Gradually, more and more attention is paid to suprasegmentals.

5.3 Find out Fossilized Sound Elements

The sound element which is wrongly pronounced again and again with the same substitute after a week's correction and practice may be regarded as fossilized element.

5.4 Choose Several Fossilized Sound Elements as the Targets to Crack

The author will find out and correct every mistake my student made when he read words or text. But each time there must be several focal elements to be dealt with, and the first round of process for some fossilized elements usually lasts for several weeks.

5.5 Compare Subject's Fossilized Elements with Correct Ones

When the student always reads one sound element wrongly and cannot sense it, the author records it and lets him hear his own pronunciation. Then we show the correct model. Thus we can make him sense the difference and figure out the problem in their pronunciation. Constantly, the student is encouraged to imitate the correct model.

5.6 Explanation

If the student still cannot pronounce the sound element properly, it is necessary to explain manners and places of articulation of relevant segmentals and proper ways to pronounce relevant suprasegmentals. Relevant English phonetic knowledge is supposed to be taught to the subjects considering their mature faculty of learnability.

5.7 Minimal Pairs/Sets and Drills

When the student can pronounce sound elements correctly in certain context, he is guided to practice them in different linguistic contexts as much as possible. Minimal pairs/sets and drills, including texts, are the linguistic contexts available for distribution of correct pronunciation.

5.8 Tongue Twisters

Persistent practice of tongue twisters is helpful for pronunciation by bettering learners' flexibility of vocal organs, thus enhance their ability to pronounce more clearly.

5.9 Text Reading and Conversation

Students are expected to read the text they've practiced for some days to see if they can pronounce what have been remedied correctly. The text reading will be recorded as an evidence for the case study and as homework for the student to compare it with the native speaker's recordings. And not only that, they are also expected to pronounce it correctly in the casual conversation. We often initiate a conversation or ask the student to paraphrase a word, a sentence, or read a new text where may involve the target sound element so as to practice and evaluate the target sound element constantly.

6. Conclusion

After nine months of De-fossilizing learning, most of pronunciations of words are corrected for student A, while there is almost no progress for student B in pronunciation.

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