

## **Analysis on the Causes of Phonological Fossilization**

Lei Shi<sup>1</sup>, Hongguo Li<sup>2</sup> and Miao Liu<sup>3,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Foreign Language Teaching Department, Changchun University of Chinese Medicine, Jingyue Street, Changchun, China

<sup>2</sup>Hainan College of Foreign Studies, Wunchang, China

\*Corresponding author

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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 causes of fossilization of pronunciation of the foreign language learning in China.

### **Introduction**

It is obvious that phonological fossilization is the result of repeated wrong production of phonetic-phonological language forms. So much so that the distorted sound features are set as alternatives available to the learners whenever the situation calls for. There are many factors that can have a say for causing phonological fossilization, which are categorized as external factors and internal factors in a broad sense.

### **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.

### **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.

### **External Factors**

Chinese English learners learn English in the environment where few English native speakers are available. And they begin to learn English after they have mastered their mother tongue to a certain degree. The different social and cultural environment will certainly constitute some factors that will affect their English pronunciation acquisition.

### **Imitation of the Wrong Pronunciation**

A serious problem for English learners in China is that most English teachers themselves are in fact English learners. Some of them, especially the teachers in South China, teach pronunciation with accents and many fossilized sound elements. Therefore, those teachers often than not set wrong

examples to the students and give positive feedback to the students who make the same mistakes as they do. This is an external factor which prompts wrong learning. And those wrongly learned sound elements will easily get fossilized.

### **Lack of Authentic Audio Input**

English is a foreign language in China, the limited learning circumstances will definitely affect the quantity and quality of English audio input. It is fairly normal of Chinese non-English majors to read English aloud everyday but rarely listen to English. They just pronounce words and sentences as they presume to be right rather than making frequent comparison with English native speakers.

### **Lack of Proper Feedback**

In China, most college English learners do not have enough chances to speak English. And if some enthusiastic learners do find or create chances to practice oral English with other English learners or English native speakers, the focal point for them is negotiation of meaning. No one would like to point out others' wrong pronunciation initiatively.

### **Internal Factors**

There are many factors which may influence the outcome of the college students' English pronunciation acquisition.

#### **Acoustic Perceptibility**

The learner's phonological fossilization, to some extent, is the result of his poor acoustic perceptibility for which may prompt wrong learning. That is to say, the better one's acoustic perceptibility is, the less sound elements will be fossilized

#### **Disharmony between Neural System and Vocal Organs**

Disharmony between neural system and vocal organs is a prevalent phenomenon for any language speakers, either for a native language speaker or a foreign language speaker. It is just a matter of degree. If a language learner has a higher degree of disharmony, the more sound elements may be fossilized.

#### **Attitudes and Beliefs**

Learners' attitudes and beliefs, to a great extent, will affect their pronunciation. Some Chinese English learners seldom pay attention to the pronunciation when they begin to learn English in middle school. To them, the most important thing is to pass the English exam, therefore pronunciation is ignored.

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