CHALLENGES IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY

Óqituvchi **Órinboyeva Gulizro**
Talaba **Bakirova Barno**

Abstract; *This article explores the complexities faced by second language (L2) learners in acquiring English phonetics and phonology. It particularly focuses on the articulation and perception problems due to the absence of certain phonemic contrasts in the learners' native languages. Examples from Greek, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese speakers illustrate how phonetic and phonological mismatches lead to difficulties in sound production and comprehension. The article also discusses how phonotactic constraints and orthographic inconsistencies of English further hinder accurate pronunciation and fluency. Special attention is given to the problematic 'r' and 'l' sounds, graphemic variations like <ough>, and the impact of phonotactics on word formation. Recommendations are offered for more effective teaching strategies that cater to these cross-linguistic challenges.*

Keywords*:Phonetics, Phonology, L2 acquisition, English pronunciation, articulation, phonotactics, phonemic contrast*

MAIN BODY

When learning English as a second language, learners often face difficulties both in articulation and perception of sounds not present in their native languages.

For instance, Greek speakers struggle with late postalveolar fricatives and affricates due to lack of such contrasts in Greek. Similarly, Spanish speakers often replace

the English [ɹ] sound with a tapped [ɾ], leading to miscommunication. Japanese learners commonly substitute English [ɹ] with either [r] or [l], since Japanese does not

have the lateral approximant [l], and both sounds are voiced alveolar approximants.

This phonological similarity causes confusion. A notable anecdote involves a Japanese speaker saying “ram,” meaning “lamb,” which shows how sound misperception affects clarity.

Chinese speakers, on the other hand, tend to pronounce [ɹ] as [l], causing phrases like “egg-fried rice” to be misunderstood as “egg-flied lice.”

The issue extends to graphemic and phonotactic aspects. For example, the grapheme <o> in English can produce different sounds like /ɒ/ in “not,” /əʊ/ in “go,” and /ʌ/ in “month.”

Such variability confuses L2 learners, especially those from French or Italian backgrounds. The <ough> sequence is also inconsistent, varying in pronunciation across words like

“though,” “rough,” and “through.”

Phonotactics also pose challenges. Spanish does not allow /sC/ clusters at the beginning of words, unlike English. Thus, Spanish speakers often add an epenthetic vowel [e],

saying [eˈspain] for “Spain.”

Understanding these linguistic difficulties can help educators tailor instruction and materials to support L2 learners more effectively.

Additional Theoretical Background

In second language acquisition, phonetics and phonology represent one of the most intricate domains due to the deep-rooted influence of the learner’s first language (L1).

The phonological system of L1 can significantly affect the perception and production of sounds in the target language (L2). For example, learners often rely on the closest

approximation in their native language to produce unfamiliar sounds, leading to substitutions, omissions, or distortions.

The concept of "phonemic contrast" is central to this discussion. When L1 lacks a specific phonemic distinction present in L2, learners may struggle to perceive and reproduce it accurately.

This is particularly evident in the perception of English vowel contrasts like /iː/ vs /ɪ/ (as in "sheep" vs "ship") or consonants like /θ/ and /ð/, which do not exist in many other languages.

Another challenge lies in suprasegmental features, such as intonation, stress, and rhythm. English is a stress-timed language, whereas languages like French or Turkish are syllable-timed.

This mismatch often leads to unnatural rhythm or misplacement of stress in English speech produced by L2 learners.

Moreover, the phonotactic rules — which dictate allowable sound combinations and syllable structures — also vary cross-linguistically. Learners may unconsciously apply their native

phonotactic constraints, resulting in epenthesis (inserting extra vowels), consonant deletion, or incorrect syllable boundaries.

Research in this field suggests that early and focused exposure to L2 phonology, including both perception and production training, can mitigate many of these challenges.

Technological tools such as spectrogram analysis, minimal pair drills, and shadowing exercises have proven beneficial in helping learners acquire more native-like pronunciation.

REFERENCES:

1.Roach, P. (2009). English Phonetics and Phonology. Cambridge University Press.
2.Ladefoged, P., & Johnson, K. (2014). A Course in Phonetics. Cengage Learning.
3.Crystal, D. (2008). A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. Blackwell Publishing.
4.Yavas, M. (2011). Applied English Phonology. Wiley-Blackwell.
5.Syllabus Relevance

6.This article aligns with theoretical phonetics topics in the syllabus by addressing key aspects such as phoneme perception, articulatory difficulties, phonological contrasts, and the influence of native language phonotactics on second language pronunciation. It provides practical insights that can support language instruction and curriculum development in phonetics and phonology courses.