SOURCES AND CAUSES OF ERRORS IN READING ENGLISH BY THE TENTH CLASS STUDENTS OF ASSAMESE MEDIUM SCHOOLS

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Abstract

English as a second/foreign language has grown inextricably linked to the Indian educational system. Physical, intellectual, and emotional participation is required to properly convey and comprehend linguistic communications in a second language. To learn is to commit error. Errors are observed as deviations from normally accepted linguistic forms. Errors recur in the course of learning any language. It is unfortunate that language teachers, who are supposed to teach all four basic language skills with equal emphasis, focus more on teaching writing, then speaking or conversation, then listening and reading. Reading abilities are rarely taught in the classroom; if they are, it is either for writing practice or squandered in the name of formality by language teachers. Teachers' hostile perspective toward reading abilities results in children developing poor reading habits. 250 pupils from 15 Assamese medium schools in Assam's Jorhat District were chosen with the goal of identifying the sources and causes of erroneous English reading performance. Only those parts of reading were researched and analyzed that assisted researchers in determining the origins of errors in reading English by students.

Keywords: Errors, inter-lingual, intra-lingual, sources, causes, reading, Assamese students, English, target language.

Introduction

Language is a carrier of civilization and culture (**Bolinger**, **1968**). In the case of the mother tongue, the student learns it easily, with the favorable environment and lot of exposure to the language. But, learning a second language necessitates willful efforts to learn it and the exposure to the second language in the majority cases is restricted (**Bose, 2007**). Many variables influence the process of acquiring a second language. With a view to focus on much neglected reading skills in English an attempt has been made to find out sources and causes of errors in English reading performances of 250 students from 15 Assamese medium schools in Assam's Jorhat District. Only those aspects of reading that aided researchers in establishing the causes of mistakes in English reading by pupils were investigated and evaluated.

Importance of Errors in Language Learning Process

"Errors are like straws, upon the surface flow,

He who would search for pearls must dive below." **John Dryden**.

Nothing can be learned without committing errors. Errors are observed as deviations from normally accepted linguistic forms. Errors committed in the mother tongue are easily corrected by parents' and family members and lot of exposure to the language. The errors committed in learning English as a second or foreign language are totally different because of the different linguistic and cultural habits of the learners. Sometimes other known languages interfere at all stages of learning the target language.

Importance of Reading

Reading can be termed as an art of good pronunciation, articulation, correct intonation, right emphasis, tone, speed, etc with correct interpretation of sense. **Elizabeth. S. Pang et.al** (**2003**) considers that reading involves interpreting written texts. It is an intricate process requiring both perception and thought. Word recognition and comprehension are two interconnected steps in reading. Reading skill opens up new horizon and chances- from learning new things, appreciating literature, to accomplishing activities that are humdrum in modern life. Among the various types of reading, reading aloud, silent reading, extensive reading and intensive reading are quite common.

Sources and Causes of Errors in Second or Foreign Language Acquisitions

Number of linguistics and language experts recognized different sources and causes of errors in second language acquisition. Some of the characteristics that influence the language learning process are attitude, self-confidence, motivation, and duration of exposure to the language, classroom settings, surroundings, family background, and the availability of qualified teachers (**Verghese**, **2009**). **Chau** (**1975**) found 51% inter-lingual errors committed by English speakers learning Spanish. **Lane** (**1989**) and some others found interference of mother tongue as the main source of errors. **Selinker** (**1972**) found other sources like intra-lingual confusions, faulty pedagogical procedures along with interference of mother- tongue as the causes of errors.

S.D.Krashen (**1976**) mentions, "*Many of the errors in the L2 acquisition are developmental than solely a result of interference*". Different linguistic structure, cultural habits, phonological errors, incorrect exposure, faulty method of teaching, poor memory retention are some other sources of errors in second language acquisition It was realized that more or less Inter-lingual Factors and Intra-lingual Factors are the root sources of errors.

Sources and Causes of Errors in Reading English

The sources and causes of errors that occurred in English reading performances of students from Assamese medium schools were inter-lingual, intra-lingual and some other factors that indirectly hampered as the observation disclosed.

1. Inter-lingual Factors

Inter-lingual errors are the result of language transfer, which is caused by the learner's first language according to **Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992)**. Inter-lingual errors may occur at different levels of reading from transfer of phonology, grammatical pattern to word-meanings of the native language into the target language. **Tarone (1979)** divides the transfer of elements from mother tongue to target language into three types- Negative transfer, Positive transfer, and Divergent Negative transfer**.** While forming new concepts, due to lack of knowledge, sometimes the learners oversimplify the use of target language. It happens with the most common structures of target language like plural formation, affixation, and so on**.** Some of the inter-lingual errors revealed during study are –

1.1. Lack of Sufficient Knowledge of English as a whole

The observation of the researchers disclosed that many of the Assamese students lacked sufficient knowledge of English language. Their erroneous reading performances reflected their inability to read English correctly and skillfully. For most of them being audible in the class is reading loudly with no pause or intonation or considering other punctuation marks. To a surprise both teachers and students were hardly aware of different reading styles and patterns of different genre of English literature. Their reading of poetry, prose, narration and reading of conversation was same.

1.2. *Errors Due to Meager Knowledge of Phonological Pattern of English*

It was found that most of the Assamese speaking students and most of their teachers did not know the phonological pattern of English; hence they failed to relate the similar sounds of Assamese and English. Some of them with little knowledge of phonology substituted certain sounds of English with Assamese sounds whereas some committed errors in recognizing different sounds of English and replaced them with Assamese sound system. For them 'his' and 'bite' are pronounced similarly but actually they follow different sound patterns. Lack of conscious efforts was quite visible.

1.3. *Errors in Identifying Grapheme-Phoneme-Relationship*

The Assamese speaking students got fewer opportunities to listen or hear the recorded sounds of English. Moreover, writing being the prime concern to score in exams listening, speaking and reading were either ignored or subdued. This negligence of teachers resulted in doubt amongst students as they remain unknown with the distinct pattern of letter- sound correspondence in English. For example- Majority of the students chosen for the study failed to differentiate between the sounds of 'Due' and 'Queue'. 'were' and 'where'.

1.4. *Errors Due to Translation of Assamese Linguistic Habits into English*

Observation revealed that English teachers themselves were making excessive use of Assamese intonation and stress patterns while teaching English. Even for translation they were translating linguistic habits of Assamese into English. Some students have Assamese accent in their reading of English while some followed Assamese stress pattern while pronouncing certain English words. For instance all the consonantal sounds were pronounced with an additional 'a' sound like-'there' was pronounced as 'theyare' and 'lately' as 'lataly' by majority of the students reflected the pull of Assamese in reading English.

2. Intra-lingual and Developmental Errors in Reading English

Ellis (1997) states, some errors seem to be universal, reflecting learners' attempts to make the task of learning and using the target language simpler. Errors due to overgeneralization and simplification are typical in second language learners' speaking and reading abilities. Intra-lingual errors are caused by incorrect or incomplete target language acquisition rather than language transmission. They might be the result of the effect of one target language item on another. Intra-lingual errors arise when learners try to construct ideas and hypotheses about the target language based on their limited experience with it. Many intra-lingual errors were noticed in the reading performances of the Assamese students.

2.1. *Overgeneralization*

Majority of the students pronounced certain words according to the spelling written not as per the sounds. This un-phonetic character of English orthography posed difficulties to the learners of this study when they read the given portion. They pronounced 'due' and 'queue' differently as they were written whereas 'due' and 'queue' are pronounced similarly as the second set of 'ue' in 'queue' remains silent.

2.2. *Redundant Use, Permutation and Hypercorrection*

Sometimes the zealous efforts of teachers in correcting the students' erroneous performance induce the students to make errors in otherwise correct forms. According to **Stenson** (1978) this type of error are "*induced errors*." For example, there is no similar sound

for 'ch' as in 'much' in Assamese, hence some pronounced it as 's', some as 'sh' while a few pronounced it as 'chh' .

2.3. *Overlooking Rule Restrictions*

Assamese students' performances' were full of such errors. The different sounds for's' in sugar, solid, scissors were given the same sound of 's'. Ignorantly majority of the students gave sound to 'r' in sir, singer, there, etc whereas some of them gave sounds to the geminate words in arrive, middle, cotton, etc. Lack of understanding, confusion and negligence might sometimes have lead Assamese learners to ignore the rule restricted for the structure of the English language.

2.4. *Fossilization*

Some faults, particularly pronunciation problems, endure for extended periods of time and are difficult to eliminate. Examples of fossilized errors in Assamese learners are the lack of distinction between 'v' and 'b' sounds and 'ch' sound with 's' or chh' in English. These errors stick with them as a habit if not caught in time.

2.5. *Incomplete Rule Applications*

Punctuation markings have a crucial role in language acquisition and comprehension. Findings disclosed that all Assamese students (selected) were aware of basic punctuation symbols like as commas, question marks, and full stops and their usage but hardly any of them utilize in their reading. They were aware of contracted forms in writing but extended those words while reading. For ex-'It's' was pronounced as 'it is'.

2.6. *False Concept hypothesized*

 Many learners' errors were attributed to wrong hypotheses formed by these learners about English. For example, some learners conceptualize that all the words written in English are to be pronounced so they pronounced 'r' in poor, singer, sugar, etc, and 'ue' in queue, some gave sounds to both 'r' in 'arrive' ,'d' in 'middle', 't' in 'cotton', etc. According to **Richards (1971)** such errors are '*developmental errors'*.

3. Other Factors Contributing to Errors in Reading English

Observation reveals that there are some other factors that are not closely related to the learners' mother tongue/native language or the target language (English here) but had an adverse effect on reading performance of the learners. Teacher-induced errors are such errors that contribute to the blemished English reading abilities among Assamese students. Most of the students imitate their teachers'; unknowingly they copy their blemished performances too.

At times overgeneralization and oversimplification of certain rules by the teacher also confuses the learners and direct them to imperfect performances.

3.1. *Improper and Less Reading Approach*

The study disclosed that reading in English received lesser attention than required. The teachers' own reading was riddled with errors and revealed a substantial transfer of their mother tongue's reading habits.

3.2. *Untrained, Ill-trained and Overburdened Teachers*

Teachers' training programs aim to prepare teachers to face a variety of challenges associated with the teaching and learning process of a specific subject. Unfortunately, the majority of English language teachers in Assamese medium schools lack basic language teaching skills. Almost none of them were aware of different reading strategies and styles. Interestingly, a teacher with master's degree in literature was teaching both English language and literature. Obviously, such teachers value literature over language. These literature-trained teachers were partly to blame. Oversized classrooms, overburdened with correction work, and a limited time duration force teachers to overlook training in certain skills that aren't necessary to exhibit the results. It was apparent that some teachers willing to give reading opportunities to all the students, time constraints and overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for them to do so.

3.3. *Lack of Integrated Reading and Writing Habits*

Students become confused and disinterested when they are exposed to integrated learning with little expertise and understanding of the language. The majority of the time, only a few carefully chosen chapters from the required textbooks that are thought to be crucial for passing the written tests are taught. Even exercises to improve other language abilities such as reading and comprehension are left untouched. English teachers were supposed to help students develop basic language skills for better learning and comprehension, but their primary focus has remained on writing abilities.

3.4. *Unfavorable and Ineffective Learning Environment*

Unfavorable and Ineffective Learning Environment is another major factor leading to deviated performances of the Assamese students. Congested classes with varying learning paces create boredom or disinterest among students. Lack of motivation and emotional involvement leads to distraction among students. It was also exposed that students from schools located in densely populated areas were more distracted and inattentive. Less

opportunities to read and listen and verbal interaction in English for all students correlates with poor reading performance. All of these variables disrupt and detour the learning process, exposing the students to erroneous reading.

3.5. *Outdated and Irrelevant Textbooks*

On one hand irrelevant and outdated references in the textbooks failed to draw the attention and interests of the readers' on the other hand some stories repeated occurrence does not match required difficulty level.

3.6. *Irregularity and Absenteeism among Students, a Regular Practice in Assam*

It was observed that every now and then the Bodoland separatists or other anti-social activists call for a strike and every activity come to a halt, even schools and all educational institutions in Assam remain closed till the strikes are not called off. Due to violent ambience the teaching and learning process get hampered.

3.7. *Lack of Relevant, Timely and Adequate Assessment and Feedback Techniques*

Undoubtedly, the improper method of teaching affects the readers' performances, but due to lack of apposite, timely and adequate assessment and feedback techniques, the errors in students' performances remained unrectified and students assumes their performances flawless and up to the mark.

3.8. *Physiological and Mental Disorders*

Improper visions, stammering, memory lapses, physical and mental disability are among the physiological disorders that have a negative impact on students' English reading habits. Besides above mentioned causes the socio-economic status and the educational attainment of the parents add on to the difficulties.

Conclusion

The observation of this study revealed that the errors in reading of English by Assamese students were mainly owing to the negligence of the teachers, poor teaching methodology, insufficient and outdated teaching materials and aids and lack of congenial atmosphere. Learning a foreign language is exclusively a formal affair depending on the existing condition and location of school, socio-economic status and educational qualification of the parents, efficiency and competency of the teachers and learners zeal to learn. Some of the errors can be rectified then and there where as some need constant and watchful practice. Errors are markers of how far you've come in learning English as a second or foreign language. To eradicate reading errors both teachers and students have to work hard. Efficient, well-trained, and experienced teachers must provide current knowledge as well as appropriate

teaching materials and aids in a positive environment. Students must maintain a positive attitude in order to learn and face challenges eloquently.

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