

Effect of PPP and Repetition Technique in Teaching Pronunciation to EFL Learner at the Elementary level in Iran

1.1.Introduction

It is reasonable to accept the fact that L1 English speakers can recognize the foreign accents of non-L1 English speakers like Chinese, Italian, and Farsi accents, which may affect the intelligibility of certain sounds, but more often it conveys the fact that such speakers are not L1 English speakers. In other words, a foreign accent is the constant occurrence of the phonetic differences from the norms of a language which L1 speakers of that language recognize as unfamiliar to the sound system of their own language (Brown, 2004). Actually, foreign accent may show L2 learners unintelligible in the sense that they are often misunderstood, or they may be intelligible but understanding them requires more effort.

Furthermore, for being competent English speaker, learners should know a number of skills involving vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, and so on. Besides, it can be argued that the most important of such skills is pronunciation. Although some learners have a good knowledge of vocabularies and the grammatical rules of the English language, their speaking would be unintelligible if they have a poor pronunciation. Though pronunciation is an aspect of language difficult to acquire, the reality is that in many English language classrooms, teaching pronunciation is granted the least attention.

A major difficulty, however, facing almost L2 learners is the achievement of acceptable pronunciation that enables them to be understood by L1 English speakers. In fact, many of these learners master the elements of language such as syntax, morphology, or even semantics to the

level of almost native-like competence but often fail to master phonology. According to Avery and Ehrlich (1992), the nature of a foreign accent is determined, to a large extent, by the learners' L1. In other words, the sound system and the syllable structure of an L1 have some influence on the speech or production of an L2. To support this view further, Swan and Smith (1987) suggest that pronunciation errors made by L2 learners are considered not to be just random attempts to produce unfamiliar sounds, but rather reflections of their L1 sound system.

Pronunciation errors of L2, which are mentioned would naturally suggest the critical need for ESL/ EFL teachers to become more aware of the influence of learners L1 sound system and syllable structure will bring to the learning of English pronunciation. Thus, there should be attempts to find out efficient ways to improve EFL learners' pronunciation.

1.2.Statement of the Problem

Many EFL students are weak at English pronunciation that might affect their communication with others and even prevent them from being intelligible by listener. Since the English language is spoken nowadays worldwide and is highly used in many workplaces, both EFL and ESL learners need to become proficient in English in general and improve their pronunciation in particular (Brown, 2004).

Pronunciation includes the segmental and suprasegmental features of the language. Segments are the sounds of the vowels and consonants known as phonemes. The suprasegmental features- those aspects of speech that involve more than single consonants or vowels. The principal suprasegmental features are stress, length, tone, and intonation. One of the problems in English class belongs to the teachers who are worried about how much time is allotted in class

for pronunciation activities who are rather focusing on teaching the skills and subskills of English, the target language.

It is a popularly recognized notion that language is rule bound and implicitly it follows that every language has its own distinctive form which is composed by its major elements such as grammar (subdivisions of two different but inter-related areas of study—morphology and syntax), vocabulary and phonological features (Gass, 1996). An infant acquires these features and becomes a fluent speaker of his mother tongue, i.e., L1 within 5 or 6 years. He may learn another language later. A learner's thorough acquaintance with his or her native language may somehow inhibit his or her capability to familiarize with the elements of a second language during the course of learning process of the L2 (Schachter, 1992).

In order to enhance the pronunciation of the EFL learners a number of teaching techniques are presented by the ELT scholars. Of these techniques, PPP and Repetition will be focused on in the current study.

As a common procedure in language teaching, PPP, according to Ellis (2003, p. 348), involves the instructional sequence of “Present, controlled Practice and free Production”, known as PPP instruction. In this traditional procedure, as Scrivener (2009) states, Presentation refers to the ways of introducing new L2 to learners; Practice involves the stages in which L2 learners try to use the L2 themselves; and finally, in the Production stage, L2 learners should answer different kinds of exercises. For some (e.g., Batstone, 1994), the PPP procedure is legitimate since it provides structure and guidelines for a successful lesson in terms of presenting an L2 and showing how it is used in a context; for others (e.g., Willis, 1996), it is not justifiable since a typical PPP lesson cannot effectively lead to acquisition. Rather, it gives learners a false sense of

second language acquisition (SLA). It seems that there is no agreement on the effectiveness of this procedure for promoting language skills and knowledge (see Doe, 2007; Hart, 2006).

In recent years, there has been substantial interest in the role that *repetition* could play in fluency development (e.g. Lambert, Kormos & Minn, 2017). In chapters from a new handbook on instructed second language acquisition (ISLA), both Michel (2017) and Derwing (2017) argue for the usefulness of repetition in developing fluency. Michel, for example, writes: “repetition and familiarity is a fruitful way to foster higher levels of performance. Repeating a task just once may enhance students’ fluency” (Michel, 2017, p. 59).

Reviewing the literature revealed that no previous study has been conducted to investigate the effect of PPP and repetition techniques in teaching pronunciation to EFL learners at the elementary level in Iran. Thus, the current study will be an attempt to fill such gap in literature.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Pronunciation is a crucial element of every language. Therefore, there are various approaches to teaching it to language learners. Each research which paves the ground for finding an adequate and useful approach to teaching pronunciation is of great importance. Therefore, this study strived to investigate two techniques, which have been playing vital role in language learning.

The results of different studies like the present research may provide evidence to eliminate the dispute between PPP and repetition techniques. In addition, it may have some implications for syllabus designers, material developers. It can also be helpful to the teachers whether to concentrate on PPP and repetition techniques. In fact, the present study may be useful especially for teachers and researchers who are still in doubt which type of instruction, PPP and repetition

techniques, is more beneficial in language teaching. The results of the study may also be particularly helpful for language instructors since it paves the way for them to judiciously choose the best type of instruction and take full advantage of the time of their classes to teach their students.

1.4. Research Questions

RQ1. Does PPP technique have any significant effect on Iranian EFL elementary level learners' pronunciation development?

RQ2. Does repetition technique have any significant effect on Iranian EFL elementary level learners' pronunciation development?

RQ3. Is there any significant difference between the effect of PPP and repetition techniques regarding EFL elementary level learners' pronunciation development?

1.5. Research Hypotheses

HO1. PPP technique has no significant effect on Iranian EFL elementary level learners' pronunciation development.

HO2. Repetition technique has no significant effect on Iranian EFL elementary level learners' pronunciation development.

HO3. There is no significant difference between the effect of PPP and repetition techniques regarding EFL elementary level learners' pronunciation development.

1.6.Limitations and Delimitations

Like any other research, this study has some limitations which will be considered in future research. First, the sample was limited to Iranian EFL students who were studying English at institutes. Therefore, future studies can be done on learners at other educational settings (i.e., university). Second, future studies can include other instructional approaches to teaching pronunciation development. Third, future studies are essential in which the immediate and delayed posttests are conducted at different time intervals to show the effect of PPP and repetition techniques.

As the delimitations of the study, the researcher delimits the focus of the study only on pronunciation development. Moreover, out of different age and gender groups, only X-Y year-old male learners will be selected.

1.7.Definition of the Key Terms

1.7.1. PPP

PPP is a three-part teaching paradigm: Presentation, Practice and Production; based on behaviorist theory which states that learning a language is just like learning any other skill. The high degree of teacher control which characterizes the first and second stages of this approach lessens as the class proceeds, allowing the learner to gradually move away from the teacher's support towards more automatic production and understanding. (Ur, 1996)

1.7.2. Repetition

In very simple terms, then, repetition requires learners to carry out a task on more than one occasion. Repetition involves learners looking at the items and making judgements about the life of the person that owned them, and then doing it all over again, possibly after some kind of language focus. In terms of authenticity, repeating this task with exactly the same ‘items’ and with exactly the same peers might be seen as inauthentic and learners may no longer be engaged (Michel, 2017; Willis & Willis, 2007).

1.7.3. Pronunciation

According to Elliot (1995), pronunciation is one of the most important features of an individual’s speech, but a lot of teachers do not explicitly teach it. It is seldom taught by teachers in the foreign language classrooms. In addition, it is one of the most difficult challenges that language teachers and learners face. If teachers understand the characteristics that impact their learners’ pronunciation, they can effectively improve their instruction to increase the accuracy of their learners’ pronunciation.

2. Review of Related Literature

Too much attention to English pronunciation in EFL lessons shows that pronunciation is an important part of learning English. EFL Learners should know how they speak to others in order to know what to aim for. Previous studies show that EFL teachers are the only persons many learners speak to in English. If teachers don’t show the necessary guides towards understandable

pronunciation to their learners, nobody will do it. Teachers can perform this through teaching the pronunciation of new words and phrases and setting up suitable anticipations for comprehensible pronunciation in their classes (Yates & Zielinski, 2009).

Teachers can help their learners to generate comprehensible speech and this is one of the most useful things they can bring to English pronunciation teaching and learning. Teachers should find methods to show, practice, and give feedback on pronunciation in a continuous way that is more useful than a large number of pronunciation subjects (Yates & Zielinski, 2009).

According to Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012), some variables are important when integrating pronunciation into the EFL classrooms. They are learners including their ages, educational backgrounds, experiences with pronunciation instruction, and motivation, instructional settings including academic, workplace, literacy, conversation, institutional factors including teachers' educational experiences, focus of syllabus, availability of pronunciation tasks, class size, and accessibility of equipment, and linguistic variables including learners' native language, diversity or lack of diversity of native language within the group.

According to Gottlieb (2006), teaching pronunciation needs understanding three aspects of speech: perception, production, and prediction. Perception of oral language includes hearing, listening, seeing, and feeling. This sensing and thinking about all of the parts of the speech system is necessary for pronunciation: lips, tongue, throat, vocal chords, sinuses, and facial muscles. Production of oral language needs time to listen, process, and form an answer, knowledge of the elements of the language and activation of background knowledge. Prediction of oral communication needs comes through experience different contexts. Through teaching prediction strategies, EFL learners progress rapidly to become independent learners.

The history of language teaching has limited the speaking/pronunciation part to the drill or situational responsive answers. New methods have focused on accurate speaking activities focused on doing real-world speaking activities with attention to a single segmental or spelling, phrasing, rhythm, or tone element of pronunciation (Gottlieb, 2006).

Cook (2001) suggested a number of techniques for teaching and learning English pronunciation. They are use of phonetic transcript, imitation, discrimination of sounds, and communication. Schmitt (2002) mentioned some ways of learning English pronunciation like elicited mechanical production, ear training for sound contrast, and sounds for meaning contrasts.

The "Three Ps" approach to language teaching is the most common modern methodology employed by professional schools around the world. It is a strong feature of the renowned CELTA certification and other TEFL qualifications offered especially in the United Kingdom (Ludescher, 2015). Even though Evans (2016) mentioned that current thinking in Second Language Acquisition suggests that 'PPP' approach is totally unjustifiable as a means of teaching. However, it not only persists but seems to flourish.

Presentation, Practice, Production works through the progression of three sequential stages. Presentation: The teacher presents new words or structures, gives examples, writes them on the board, etc. Practice: Students practice using words or structures in a controlled way, e.g. making sentences form prompts, asking and answering questions, giving sentences based on a picture. Practice can be oral or written. Production: Students use language they have learnt to express themselves more freely, e.g. to talk or write about their own lives and interests, to express

opinions, or imagine themselves in different situations. Like practice, production can be oral or written. (Doff, 1997)

This method offers “to the novice teacher the reassurance of a detailed set of sequential steps to follow in the classroom” (Richards & Rodgers, 2008, p. 45). Many CLT classrooms used a PPP model of teaching, but the original model has been developed and modified since it was first introduced and no longer represents CLT as the only teaching model (Lindsay & Knight, 2013). Evans agreed that “PPP has evolved over the years, cherry picking the more attractive elements of other approaches, and incorporating them into its basic format” (Evans, 2014, p. 47).

PPP strongly corresponds to the three consecutive stages which are distinguished in skill acquisition theory: the cognitive, associative and autonomous stage (DeKeyser, 1998). In the cognitive stage, target grammar is explicitly taught to learners, resulting in declarative knowledge. This stage is followed by an associative stage which includes activities and practice allowing learners’ to turn declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge. Finally, learners should be provided with less focused communicative activities to enhance proceduralization and automatization in the autonomous stage.

PPP is attractive to teachers because language structures and language functions can be systematically organized in a syllabus, allowing them to easily identify what should be taught and tested in which particular sequence. (Lap, 2005). Moreover, PPP is appealing to language teachers and learners because it reflects the notion that “practice makes perfect”: It “allows the teacher to control the content and pace of each lesson”, and provides “a clear teacher role” (Thornbury & Harmer, 1999; Skehan, 2003 cited in Carless, 2009, p. 51). In other words, PPP provides teachers with the power to control their classrooms (Skehan, 1998).

However, from the 1980s onwards, PPP has received widespread criticism from many scholars among whom Lewis (1995) and Willis and Willis (1996). These critics claim that PPP is too linear and behaviorist in nature, and in this way, PPP does not take learners' readiness into consideration (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014). Thus, PPP is unlikely to lead to the successful acquisition and functional use of the forms being taught (Skehan, 1996). In addition, Thornbury and Harmer (1999) point out that PPP assumes that accuracy precedes fluency, which is often not the case. Last but not least, PPP is teacher-centered, which does not fit learner-centered frameworks being promoted in more recent approaches to education (Harmer, 1991).

Despite those criticisms, "the PPP lesson structure has been widely used in language teaching materials and continues in modified form to be used today" (Richards, 2005, p. 8). Regarding writing instruction, few empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of PPP on students' writing performance. Kim (2009) found that PPP was helpful for her IELTS writing classrooms because step-by-step guidance helped her students feel more confident in presenting their opinions in essays, and PPP also gave her as a teacher more control over the students' learning process so that she could help them better. However, the strong teacher control in a PPP approach may refrain students from developing the self-regulating skills deemed necessary to become fully independent, competent writers.

Repetition involves circling the steps from which learners should take and language learners are asked to repeat the same or slightly reformed task for a week or two (Bygate & Samuda, 2005). Repetition is often argued as an implementation procedure for oral tasks, as it is commonly believed that learners improve their L2 performance by repeating the same or similar tasks. There are different forms of repetition, such as repeating the same procedure with different

content (procedural repetition) and repeating the same task with same content (Ellis, 2009). In this study, task repetition refers to repeating the same task and content.

According to Bygate and Samuda (2005), repetition is a kind of planning and they claim that repetition has “the potential to lead to integration of knowledge and performance” and it could be regarded as “facilitating changes particularly in the conceptualization and formulation phases of the production process” (Bygate & Samuda, 2005, p. 32).

Bozorgian and Kanani (2017) studied the effects of task repetition on accuracy and fluency of EFL learners’ speaking skill. The results of their study indicated that learners in the experimental group completed task repetition outperformed better than the other learners in the control group. Moreover, the findings of pre-test and post-test showed that task repetition led to improvement in the intermediate learners’ accuracy and fluency in speaking skill.

Qui and Yi Lu (2016) explored the influence of content familiarity and repetition on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners’ engagement in oral performance. Repeating the tasks, however, can negatively influenced behavioral and cognitive engagement, although the participants felt more relaxed and confident. Additionally, the participants were more motivated to repeat unfamiliar topics, although they demonstrated more noticeable declines in their frequency of self-repair (an indicator of cognitive engagement) for these topics.

Birjandi and Ahangari (2008) explored the effects of task repetition and task type on fluency, accuracy, and complexity of Iranian EFL learners’ oral performance. The results revealed that task repetition, and task type, as well as the interaction between these variables resulted in significant differences in participants’ oral discourse in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

Methodology

Design

The method adopted in this study is quantitative research. Quasi-experimental design will be used in the way that there are both the experimental and the control groups to find answers for the research questions. There will be also a pretest and a posttest for all the groups and an eight-session treatment period (between the pretest and posttest).

Participants

Using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), 60 out of X Iranian EFL learners at the English language institutes in Tehran, Iran, will be selected as the main participants of the current study and administered as the elementary level. Their age ranges X-Y years old. All of the participants are supposed to take a pretest and posttest. Participants' gender will not be taken into account as a variable in this study. The selected participants will be divided into three language classes, i.e. a control group and two experimental groups. It should be noted that in order to ensure the homogeneity of participants OPT will be utilized.

Instrumentations

Three main instruments will be used in the current study.

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

In order to check the level of general language proficiency of the participants at the beginning of the study, and to find out a homogenous sample, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) will be used. The items of the OPT test are taken from ‘Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL Test by Philips (2018). In addition, using the KR-21 formula, the internal consistency of the test is calculated and reported, which is fairly satisfactory. Furthermore, to ensure its validity, it is reviewed by three language experts and their comments are used in its follow-up version.

The OPT consists of four parts: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, grammatical structures, and speaking section. The test has 100 items for which the highest score was 100. Based on the standard of the test itself, and since the items of the test were time-consuming, the allotted time was 100 minutes. This test is selected because it is inexpensive, easy to administer, and easy to score objectively. Moreover, the grammar section of OPT is expected to evaluate learners’ knowledge of sentence structure. Listening section of the test consists of 30 items in multiple-choice form followed by reading comprehension section consisting of three passages with 10 questions in multiple-choice form. The third section of the OPT aims at testing the grammatical knowledge of participants by giving 30 questions in multiple-choice forms. The last section is speaking skill included 10 open-ended questions asked by two professional raters.

Pronunciation Pretest

Firstly, a list of around 300 pronunciation words chosen from Oxford Dictionary (2005) will be given to a panel of experts to identify the proper words, which are utilized for the purpose of this study. Following that, a pronunciation test is designed based on 50 items. To assure the content validity of the constructed test, the researcher appeals to expert opinion. To this aim, two PhD holders in the field of TEFL will review the test items and comment on the faulty items.

To add to the validity and reliability of the test, it is also piloted on 15 participants having similar characteristics to those of the main participants, and Cronbach's Alpha is run to assure the internal consistency of the test. The rationale behind choosing the items with item difficulty lower than 0.20 is that the researcher intended to carry out the treatment on the items the learners were unfamiliar with to the extent possible.

Pronunciation Posttest

Another test is used to examine the participants' pronunciation improvement at the end of the treatment as the posttest. The only difference between this test and the pretest is that the sequence of the items had been changed in order to avoid "practice effect" (Bachman, 1990) on the part of the participants.

Data Collection

To answer the main research questions in the present study, first of all, OPT will be administered among X language learners in four English classes at the English language institute in Tehran,

Iran. Afterwards, based on the results of the placement test, 60 students who will get the same score will be divided randomly into three groups. A pretest is also taken for the three selected groups. Two experimental groups will receive 8 sessions of instructions but the control group will not receive the same instruction. One experimental group will be taught by using PPP instruction and another experimental group will benefit from repetition instruction.

As the fundamental part of the procedure in this study, a pretest on pronunciation will be given to all the participants in order to measure their general English pronunciation ability. After conducting 8 sessions of instruction, a post-test with the same content as the pretest will be given to all the participants in order to measure their pronunciation improvement in English. Finally the results will be analyzed and described in detail.

Data Analysis

Gathered data from the pretest and posttest will be analyzed by administering independent sample t-test. In addition, to find out answer for the second question ANOVA will be conducted.

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