

Accent Variation and its Effects on Learning English as a Second Language

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Abstract

Teaching or learning English as a second language implies a number of challenges and difficulties. Some of these challenges directly related to vocabulary, grammar rules, idioms, etc. The Accent is considered one of these challenges that may face non-native speakers or learners. In return, it affects students' learning to English as a second language. To make the matter clearer, the effects of accent variation exceed the limits of teaching and learning of English in our schools and universities where it can affect students' employability after graduation.

The issue of English accent is a standout amongst the most perceptible signs of English as a second language. It has a great deal of attention when it is connected to English acquisition. By learning English, we set the English native speaker's fluency as a goal to be reached by language learners in our schools and universities. The purpose for this consideration is because of the way that there is a developing mindfulness among second language researchers, educators, and understudies of the key part of pronunciation in the correspondence procedure and its effect on it. Past studies and researchers have concentrated fundamentally on the mentalities of learners towards Non-native accents of English and variables affecting the remote emphasize of Non-Native speakers.

It is a fact that the English language has found its way being an international language spoken by millions of people around the world. However, this brings a lot of challenges that may be faced by students and learners of English as a second language. This paper tries to shed the light on the issue of Accent Variation and its effects on learning English as a second language. Furthermore, it tries to investigate how accent variation may affect students' academic achievements as well as sometimes the failure of the communication process.

Introduction

Students in teaching and learning English as a second language are dealing with the four language skills including; reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These language areas sometimes involve some challenges that may affect students' learning and in return affect students' language acquisition as a whole. These areas represent the language as one body in which students have sufficient ability to use them all correctly and appropriately.

There are a lot of definitions that have been presented to define the word "accent", most important;

- The way in which people in a particular area, country, or social group pronounce words. (Cambridge Dictionary).
- A distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular country, area, or social class. (Oxford Dictionary).
- The unique speech patterns, inflections, choice of words, etc., that identify a particular individual. (Dictionary.com).

By reflecting upon the abovementioned definitions we can figure out the nature of accent in general and English accent in particular. It obvious that accent differences and variation may affect students' comprehension and understanding to what they deal with. This represents a gap that can negatively affect their skills as well as their will to learn this language. You can imagine that you misunderstand a sentence due to accent variation then you were asked to write an essay about this sentence. The essay itself will not be compatible with the needed subject. This creates a sense of unwillingness to study and learn this language.

Variation of accent presents a considerable challenge to students in schools and universities due to the negative impact it offers. In this context, we can figure out the slight difference between the written English and spoken English while the spoken language has a lot of accent of variation even in within one country. This paper tries to investigate the accent variation and its effects on students' learning of English as a second language. It presents a number of questions about the negative effects of accent variation on students' language acquisition as well as real assessments of the challenges are being imposed when learning the English language.

Literature Review

The English language has created a sense of a controversy. Although it is an international language but in the same time brings a lot of challenges when our students desirous to learn it. Due to this fact, many studies and researches have been conducted to show the effect of accent variation on students in their learning of English as a second language and how this may affect the whole process of language acquisition. Many of these studies have listed many difficulties in learning English including accent differences and variation.

The first study was presented by Henna (2013). The study has stressed on the emerging significance of the English language in the global communication. In the same context, there are both sides must be regarded, namely; oral and written English skills which are considered essential around the world. Despite this fact, learning English seems to be a very challenging task. This is due to the fact that the aim of English learning and education is not limited to developing knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and written skills but also to teach students the oral English skills.

This study has tried to analyze the problems in English learning according to second language acquisition theory as well the factor affecting this process. The study expressed that accent variety may prompt to confronting troubles, for example, loss of words, disappointment, uneasiness, articulation issues, losing the feeling of self-assurance, and so forth. In English speaking, it is essential to think both about the discourse and phonology in connection to second language learning. Additionally, the study expressed that accent was an influencing element identified with the standard models of English which has a solid remaining in the dispositions of the informants, and consequently the aversion of Finnish and the Japanese pronunciations of English.

In this study, the informants with a higher education had higher English accents. The difference between Finnish and Japan was that Finnish were more aware of English accents and they wanted to speak in a British English accent. On the other hand, Japanese had difficulty with listening comprehension, which in return affected their speech. Furthermore, the study pointed out that accent variation is one the factors that affects speech production as well as language learning due to difficulties or embarrassment. If the students felt that the others will not understand him due to his accent, this might cause anxiety and prevent the student from speaking, participating, as well as improving his language skills.

The second study was presented by Margaret (2013). The study has stated that accent is the second problem face non-native learners which make them encounter many difficulties and problems while learning the English language. There are a lot of factors that influence their accent such as their first language accent. The same case with English teachers who have strong mother tongue and this sometimes makes it hard for their students to clearly understand the

words are being said. This in return creates different phonological characteristics in English pronunciation.

In addition to the above said, unfamiliar accents are often the source of comprehension problems. Some studies stated that 68% of students have reported that their comprehension was affected by the speaker's accent. The study also pointed out that the accent differences in English as a second language present problems for students such as variable intelligibility as well as the negative attitude towards some varieties and speakers which significantly affect the second language input. This means that the student or the learner attitude towards specific accents and dialects plays a significant role in listening comprehension as well as understanding among ESL learners.

The third try was an article published on Oxford Royal Academy website (2014). The article has listed four major difficulties which English poses for English Foreign Learners. One of these difficulties was the existence of many variations of English. Though the fact it is one language but it's spoken quite differently in various countries as we mentioned before in America or Britain. Therefore, we can find different accent in USA, Australia, New Zealand as well as South Africa. The Article stressed on the fact that accent variations represent itself as a difficulty in front of English Foreign Learners as it leads to comprehension problems. Even more, if we added the regional dialects which mean that the same word can be pronounced in a very different way depending on the person who says it.

An example of this, the pronouncing the "a" in the word "bath"; on north-south they tend to pronounce it as in the word "barth" with long "a". This in return creates a sense of uncertainty in the words and vocabularies students are learning. This means that students have the ability to

follow the standard of pronunciation better than the nonstandard where no rules to control this variation.

By reviewing the abovementioned studies and articles we can figure out what is meant by accent variation and its effects on learning English as a second language. This issue creates a series of challenges in front of English foreign learners. Facing accent variation by our students means that they may know more than one pronunciation for the same word. If this was the case with millions of word, serious problems with learning the English language will arise. As previously mentioned accent variation negatively affects students' learning and in return their academic achievements. Many studies showed that the perception of the accent often results in a negative evaluation of the speakers. This negative evaluation may mirror the prejudices rather than real issues with the understanding of the accent.

Significance of the Study

This paper discusses one of the important issues faced by learners when learning the English language. It suggests that accent variations create more loads on our students where the student should learn one pronunciation for one word he listens to more than one pronunciation. In this context, it was important to highlight the effect of such issue as it affects students' outcomes and their academic achievement. Moreover, it was important to realize our need for more practice to overcome such challenges. Doing so would help us to ovoid misunderstand, misconception, and comprehension problems.

Study Question

This paper tries to answer the following key question;

- What is meant by accent variation and its effects on learning English as a second language?

Study Tools & Methodology

Proving the thesis of this paper requires conduction certain actions and procedures in order to maintain the goal of this paper. This includes;

- Conduct interviews with English teachers in King Faisal University to know their point of views about accent variation and its effects on students' learning of the English language.
- Conduct interview with students in King Faisal University to know how accent variation has affected their language skills and academic achievements.
- Create a questionnaire as a tool for data collection from the respondents.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations represent the ethical issues in any conducted researches. It determines the ethical norms and standards that must be concluded as well. This includes; confidentiality, researcher's objectivity, carefulness, integrity, and honesty. Moreover, it includes the respect of other intellectual property as well as regarding the social responsibility.

Limitations of Research

This paper is limited to:

- English teachers at king Faisal University as well as students.
- A questionnaire as a tool for data collection.

Expected Results

There is no doubt that conducting the interviews with English teachers and students as well as the questionnaire will present many expected results, including;

- A better understanding of accent variation and its effects on learning the English language.
- How accent variation negatively affects students' achievements.
- Accurate evaluation of the difficulties faced by students in learning the English language in general and accent variation in particular.

References

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Appendix

Questionnaire

S	Phrase	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
1	Accent variation positively affects students in learning the English language as a foreign language.			
2	Accent variation has nothing to do with students' language skills and their academic achievements.			
3	Practicing of the English language is one of the effective ways to overcome the challenges created by accent variation.			
4	Accent variation helps in listening comprehension.			
5	There is no problem for the student to know more than one pronunciation for the same word.			
6	Accent variation motivates students to learn the English language.			
7	Students follow accent standard better than nonstandard norms.			
8	Accent variation is considered one of the advantages of the English language.			
9	Accent variation leads to the reluctance of students for language practice and learning.			
10	Students may lose their self-confidence in speaking in front of other due to accent variation.			
11	Accent and pronunciation affect listening and speaking.			