
English Pronunciation Self-Concept as a Determinant of English Learning

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine English pronunciation self-concept as a determinant of English learning. A lot of people learn English at school, where English is a common subject. The study asserted that the English language is somehow dependent on pronunciation. For instance, vocabulary learning is achieved by pronunciation processing of words. Contested or widely mispronounced words are typically verified by the sources from which they originate, such as names of cities and towns or the word GIF (Graphics Interchange Format). English self-concept belongs to the academic category, which itself is further classified into other sub-categories, such as English reading self-concept and English pronunciation self-concept. The study concluded that self-concept is divided into two categories: academic and non-academic self-concept. English self-concept belongs to the academic category, which itself is further classified into other sub-categories, such as English reading self-concept and English pronunciation self-concept. Also, it was concluded that the more students are proficient in English language learning, the more their performance in pronunciation will improve. And the more psychological barriers are resolved, the more efficient pronunciation in English will be. One of the recommendations made was that, considering "self-concept" and its pivotal role in overall academic achievement, stakeholders in the realm of English language teaching and learning should take the self-concept issue into account in regards to fostering students' academic performance.

KEYWORDS: Self-Concept, English Pronunciation/Learning

Introduction

Academic self-concept (ASC) has been widely researched, with studies spanning over four decades. In a general sense, academic self-concept (ASC) can be defined as one's academic self-perceptions or one's perception of one's general ability in school. Doherty, (2009) stated that by the time children are in grade school, they have learned that they are unique individuals, and they can think about and analyze their own behavior. They also begin to show awareness of the social situation—they

understand that other people are looking at and judging them the same way that they are looking at and judging others. For example, infants who red dots painted on their foreheads recognize themselves in a mirror, and they do this by about 18 months of age (Asendorpf, Warkentin, & Baudonnière, 2006; Povinelli, Landau, & Perilloux, 2006). The child's knowledge about the self continues to develop as the child grows. By two years of age, the infant becomes aware of his or her gender as a boy or a girl. At age four, the child's self-descriptions are likely to be based on physical features, such as hair color, and by about age six, the child is able to understand basic emotions and the concepts of traits, being able to make statements such as "I am a nice person" (Harter, 2008). Part of what is developing in children as they grow is the fundamental cognitive part of the self, known as the self-concept. The self-concept is a knowledge representation that contains knowledge about us, including our beliefs about our personality traits, physical characteristics, abilities, values, goals, and roles, as well as the knowledge that we exist as individuals. Throughout childhood and adolescence, the self-concept becomes more abstract and complex and is organized into a variety of different cognitive aspects of the self, known as self-schemas. Children have self-schemas about their progress in school, their appearance, their skills at sports and other activities, and many other aspects. In turn, these self-schemas direct and inform their processing of self-relevant information, much as we saw schemas in general affecting our social cognition (Harter, 2009).

Concept of English Language

The term "English" is derived from *Anglisc*, the speech of the Angles—one of the three Germanic tribes that invaded England during the fifth century. The English language is the primary language of several countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and many of its former colonies, and the United States, and the second language in a number of multilingual countries, including India, Singapore, and the Philippines. According to Finkenstaed *et al.* (2007), English is a West Germanic language originally spoken by the inhabitants of early medieval England. It is named after the Angles, one of the ancient Germanic peoples that migrated to the area of Great Britain that later took their name, England. Both names derive from *Anglia*, a peninsula on the Baltic Sea. English has changed and developed over time, like all other languages. The most obvious changes are the many words taken from Latin and Old French, which then came to Old English and then Modern English, which is used today (Baugh and Cable, 2012). Modern English has been spreading around the world since the 17th century by the worldwide influence of the British Empire and the United States. Through all types of printed and electronic media of these countries, English has become the leading language of international discourse and the *lingua franca* in many regions and professional contexts such as science, navigation and law. The influence of English continues to play an important role in language attrition. According to Crystal (2002), one impact of the growth of English is the reduction of native linguistic diversity in many parts of the world. Conversely, the natural internal variety of English along with creoles and pidgins have the potential to produce new distinct languages from English over time.

Concept of English Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the way in which a word or a language is spoken. This may refer to generally agreed-upon sequences of sounds used in speaking a given word or language in a specific dialect ("correct pronunciation") or simply the way a particular individual speaks a word or language. According to Paulston, *et. al.* (2003); Beech, *et. al.* (2009), a word can be spoken in different ways by various individuals or groups, depending on many factors, such as: the duration of the cultural exposure of their childhood, the location of their current residence, speech or voice disorders, their ethnic group, their social class, or their education. Like many other languages, English has wide variation in pronunciation, both historically and from dialect to dialect. In general, however, the regional dialects of English share a largely similar (but not identical) phonological system. Among other things, most dialects have vowel reduction in unstressed syllables and a complex set of phonological features that distinguish fortis and lenis consonants (stops, affricates, and fricatives). In linguistics, fortis and lenis, sometimes identified with tense and lax, are pronunciations of consonants with relatively greater and lesser energy. English has fortis consonants, such as the p in pat, with a corresponding lenis consonant, such as the b in bat. For English pronunciations, broad transcriptions should be used; these are intended to provide a correct interpretation regardless of the reader's accent. In English, the digraph ⟨th⟩ represents in most cases one of two different phonemes: the voiced dental fricative /ð/ (as in this) and the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ (thing). More rarely, it can stand for /t/ (Thailand, Thames) or the cluster /tθ/ (eighth). In compound words, ⟨th⟩ may be a consonant sequence rather than a digraph, as in the /t.h/ of lighthouse. In Standard English, the phonetic realization of the dental fricative phonemes shows less variation than for many other English consonants. Both are pronounced either interdently, with the blade of the tongue resting against the lower part of the back of the upper teeth and the tip protruding slightly, or with the tip of the tongue against the back of the upper teeth.

Concept of English Pronunciation Self-Concept

Pronunciation plays a pivotal role in the process of foreign language learning. Proper pronunciation and ability to understand other speakers can be of paramount importance for any English language learner. For good or bad, pronunciation is the most noticeable factor when people communicate for the first time. Chuming Wang (2004) posits that positive assessment of English pronunciation enhances one's motivation and consequently, motivational factor dramatically influences one's overall performance in English language. On the other hand, negative assessment of one's pronunciation has weakening effect on learners' motivation. Tang, Zhang, Yucogli & Zhao, (2013) supports the above notion that self-concept is not an internal element but it is a perception which influences language relevant behaviour (Tang, Zhang, Yucogli & Zhao, 2013). Self-concept is a concept related to psychology. Self-concept is defined as one's self-perception and self-assessment of their own abilities (Marsh, 2003). Pronunciation is part of a person's identity and ego. There is also language ego which determines how open an individual should be to psychological and emotional factors. It is always stated that adult EFL learners develop

psychological barrier towards pronunciation especially in the classroom contexts. The fear of exposure of their imperfect pronunciation causes them to keep silent in the classroom environment which leads to resistance in English learning. The more psychological barriers are resolved, the more efficient pronunciation learning will be. As a result, a positive pronunciation self-concept leads to better grasp of language and better learning outcomes.

Pronunciation Learning

In English grammar, orthoepy is the study of correct pronunciation prescribed for Standard English. This originally was understood to mean Received Pronunciation specifically, but other standards have emerged and been accepted since the early 20th century (e.g., General American, General Australian). Phonics is a method for teaching people how to read and write an alphabetic language (such as English, Arabic or Russian). It is done by demonstrating the relationship between the sounds of the spoken language (phonemes), and the letters or groups of letters (graphemes) or syllables of the written language. In phonology and linguistics, a phoneme is a unit of sound that can distinguish one word from another in a particular language. In English, this is also known as the Alphabetic principle or the Alphabetic code Joanne (2000). According to the alphabetic principle, letters and combinations of letters are the symbols used to represent the speech sounds of a language based on systematic and predictable relationships between written letters, symbols, and spoken words. The alphabetic principle is the foundation of any alphabetic writing system. In the education field, it is known as the alphabetic code. Emphasizing the importance of pronunciation, Pourhosein (2016) explained that to pronounce is to make a meaningful sound. English pronunciation is an important subject since it provides the students with the required knowledge to fully comprehend and communicate in this language. By knowing the correct English pronunciation, the students are able to avoid misunderstanding in the language.

English Pronunciation Self-Concept and English Language Learning

Learning English is what people do when they want to use the English language. In language learning, we often talk about language skills and language systems. Language skills include: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Language systems include vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. A lot of people learn English at school, where English is a common subject. Many people also want to spend their own personal time to learn English. Some of these people may not know any English, where others will have learned some English in school, and will want to advance their knowledge of it. As a matter of fact, learning the skills and components of English language is somehow dependent on pronunciation, for instance, vocabulary learning is achieved by pronunciation processing of words. Delivery of speaking and listening is also through the medium of pronunciation (Gass & Selinker, 2001). According to Marsh and Shawelson (1985), self-concept is divided into two categories of academic and non-academic self-concept. English self-concept belongs to academic category which itself is further classified into other sub-categories such as English reading self-

concept, English pronunciation self-concept and so on (Marsh & Yeung, 2009). When it comes to the role of pronunciation, even the case is more critical because in most cases, students tend to switch off in response for fear of imperfect pronunciation. In which, sometimes, causes resistance in English learning. Appropriate manifestation of pronunciation proficiency results in admiration on the part of both peers and teachers which enhances motivation and confidence (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cpe, 1985). However, Pronunciation self-concept and its psychological impacts has attracted attention in the process of English language learning. Considering the self-concept and its pivotal role in overall academic achievement, stakeholders in the realm of English language teaching and learning are encouraged to take self-concept issue into account.

Global English Self-Concept and Classroom Anxieties

Foreign language anxiety, also known as xenoglossophobia, is the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced in learning or using a second or foreign language. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (2004), the feelings may stem from any second language context whether it is associated with the productive skills of speaking and writing or the receptive skills of reading and listening. Foreign language anxiety is a form of what psychologists describe as a specific anxiety reaction. Research has shown that foreign language anxiety is a significant problem in language classrooms throughout the world especially in terms of its strong relationship to the skill of speaking in a foreign or second language Horwitz et, al. (2006). Some individuals are more predisposed to anxiety than others and may feel anxious in a wide variety of situations. Foreign language anxiety, however, is situation-specific and so it can also affect individuals who are not characteristically anxious in other situations. Molinsky (2007) stated that the main causes of foreign language anxiety are communication-apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Foreign language anxiety has a variety of detrimental effects on foreign language performance, but both the student and the teacher can adopt strategies to minimize the anxiety Huang (2012). Although all aspects of using and learning a foreign language can cause anxiety, both listening and speaking are regularly cited as the most anxiety provoking of foreign language activities. An example of when foreign language anxiety may occur would be in a classroom. The causes of foreign language anxiety have been broadly separated into three main components: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is the anxiety experienced when speaking or listening to other individuals. Test-anxiety is a form of performance anxiety, that is associated with the fear of doing badly or failing altogether. Fear of negative evaluation is the anxiety associated with the learner's perception of how other onlookers (instructors, classmates or others) may negatively view their language ability. These three factors cause an increase of an individual's anxiety levels as well as a decrease in self-concept Pappamihiel (2002).

General English Performance and their Pronunciation Proficiency

According to Kolawole and Oyinloye (2008), the most studied and generally desired language in the world is English Language, especially in the Nigerian society, starting from the nursery school to post-secondary school. It is a verbal behaviour governed by rules that have attained international scope (Omale, 2019). One of the challenges faced by teachers is pronunciation assessment. The term linguistic performance was used by Noam Chomsky in 1960 to describe "the actual use of language in concrete situations" Matthews (2014). It is used to describe both the production, sometimes called parole, as well as the comprehension of language Reishaan (2008). Performance is defined in opposition to "Proficiency"; the latter describes the mental knowledge that a speaker or listener has of language Carlson (2013). Proficiency in language is fundamentally viewed as the ability to make utilize language in communicative situations. In transformational generative grammar theory, Chomsky distinguishes between two components of language production: competence and performance. Competence describes the mental knowledge of a language, the speaker's intrinsic understanding of sound-meaning relations as established by linguistic rules. Performance, that is the actual observed use of language, involves more factors than phonetic-semantic understanding. Performance requires extra-linguistic knowledge such as an awareness of the speaker, audience and the context, which crucially determines how speech is constructed and analyzed Chomsk, (2006). In 1986, Chomsky proposed a distinction similar to the competence/performance distinction, entertaining the notion of an I-Language (internal language) which is the intrinsic linguistic knowledge within a native speaker and E-Language (external language) which is the observable linguistic output of a speaker. It was I-Language that Chomsky argued should be the focus of inquiry, and not E-Language. According to Smith (2009), E-language has been used to describe the application of artificial systems, such as in calculus, set theory and with natural language viewed as sets, while performance has been used purely to describe applications of natural language. Between I-Language and competence, I-Language refers to our intrinsic faculty for language; competence is used by Chomsky as an informal, general term, or as term with reference to a specific competency such as "grammatical competence" or "pragmatic competence.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Self-concept is divided into two categories of academic and non-academic self-concept. English self-concept belongs to academic category which itself is further classified into other sub-categories such as English reading self-concept and English pronunciation self-concept. Also, it is concluded that the more the students are proficient in English Language learning, the more their performance in pronunciation will improve. And the more psychological barriers are resolved, the more efficient pronunciation in English will be. Apparently, the fear of exposure of students' imperfect pronunciation causes them to keep silent in the classroom environment which leads to resistance in English learning. Generally, vocabulary learning is concluded to be achieved by pronunciation processing of words.

Recommendations

1. Considering “self-concept” and its pivotal role in overall academic achievement, stakeholders in the realm of English language teaching and learning should take self-concept issue into account in regards to foster students’ academic performance.
2. For English language users, it is not advisable to include odd pronunciations for words of foreign countries whose pronunciations are well known in English. Do not include them for common English words just because they have pronunciations that might be counterintuitive for those learning the English language.

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