

In the Name of Allah,
the Merciful,
the Compassionate

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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The Role of Positive and Negative Evidence
in the Acquisition of
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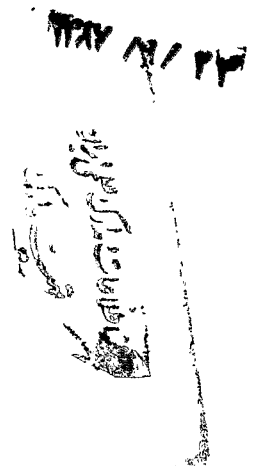
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وزارت فرهنگ و ارشاد اسلامی
سازمان اسناد و کتابخانه ملی
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To my beloved daughter
and wife

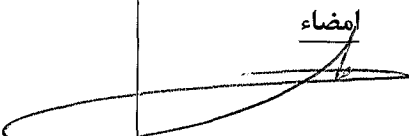

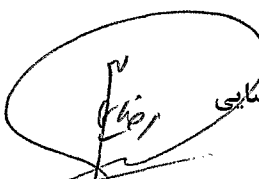
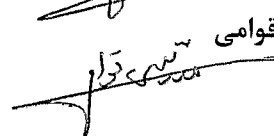
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امضاء: 

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Abstract

The difference between L1 and L2 acquisition has spawned a lot of discussions in the fields related to applied linguistics. Subset-principle guarantees L1 acquisition and UG parameter setting just by positive linguistic data (PLD). This principle is called to be inefficient in L2 acquisition. Therefore, in some situations where PLD cannot stop some generalizations, negative evidence becomes necessary. Nonetheless, Asymmetry Hypothesis rejects any acquisition when negative evidence is necessary. Furthermore, some linguists classify orthographic input as negative evidence. This project is to study the effects of different inputs on the acquisition of the allophones of consonant /l/. For this purpose, 104 young learners of English were chosen from Mehr Language School in Yazd. The subjects were put in four different input groups and received the treatment after which they were tested through a naming task. The data were analyzed by descriptive statistics, ANOVA, Scheffe test, and Univariate. The results show that Subset-principle works properly in the presence of good cues when positive evidence is available, whereas in the absence of good cues negative evidence is the most effective input. This study proves the ideas about orthographic input when good cues are present, but Asymmetry Hypothesis is rejected.

Chapter One

Introduction

1. Introduction

Is an SL or an FL learner able to become native-like? What areas are teachable and learnable? Or how should the teachers help the learners in the process of learning? These are among the frequent questions, which amuse and concern those who are interested and involved in the field of applied linguistics. This developing field has attracted a lot of research and empirical studies.

Universal Grammar (UG) by proving itself in first language acquisition has triggered the question of its accessing it in second language acquisition. It has entertained different theories and a great bulk of research. One of these fields, which is under study here is phonology. Mostly affective filters have shaded this field and sometimes made it fade. However, the questions are welcome and open to answers. When the access to UG is accepted, no matter in which way, it is very important to assign new values to it. If it is going to be triggered, questions show themselves up: What is going to be triggered? What is going to trigger it? How is it going to be triggered?

In first language acquisition, research has proved that just primary linguistic data (PLD) will work and values will be set when there are good cues. In SLA, there are many question marks raised. White (1989) considers positive evidence as the only evidence, which works as PLD. Young-Sholton (1995) limits this PLD in phonology to minus (-)orthographic evidence. Some scholars like Steele (2001) see the role of good cues very important in setting or resetting new values.

The number of those who feel the need of acquiring a second language is increasing, but overwhelmingly they stop on the way or feel hapless when pronunciation is concerned, and try not to care about it. The findings of this research can help second language learners and teachers to find a better way to deal with their problems in the field.

1.1. The Statement of the Problem and the Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the effects of input on the acquisition of the variants of /l/ in English, the durability of items acquired through different inputs, as well as the effect of good cues on the acquisition of these allophones.

1.1.1. Questions

The following questions will be addressed throughout this project, and the researcher tries to find an answer for them based on collected data.

1) Do different inputs have different effects on acquiring the allophones of the consonant /l/?

2) Do good cues have any effect on the acquisition of the variants of the consonant /l/ by the Persian-speaking learners of English?

3) Which one of the acquired items is more durable?

4) If there is any difference in durability, is it because of the form of the input or is it because of the good cue?

The raised questions put forward the following hypotheses of the study.

1.1.2. Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses will be proposed and tested in this study, which are as follows:

1. Different inputs have no significant effect on the acquisition of the allophones of the consonant /l/.

2. Good cues have no significant effect on the acquisition of the variants of the consonant /l/ by the Persian-speaking learners of English.

3. Time interval has no significant effect on the durability of the acquired items.

4. Any significant difference on the durability of the acquired items is not because of the form of the input or the existence of good cues.

1.2. The Significance of the Study

In every theory of language acquisition the importance of input is highly understood, and it is considered to be the starting-point and vital to any kind of learning (White, 2003; Young-Sholton, 1995). So, how to provide this necessary

knowledge for the learners is the main concern of every language teaching or acquisition endeavor. A language teacher should know how to put the knowledge needed for a learner and in what way. Is it necessary to provide repetitive exercises and explanations and attract the learners' attention to the details of the input and knowledge, and teach it explicitly or implicitly? Or is the case that as long as he/she uses that piece of knowledge correctly, the learners can acquire even its subtle differences?

A lot of research has been carried out on the appropriate kind of input for syntax, but there is not enough knowledge about the form of input at the phonetic/phonological level, especially since it takes some effects from the orthographic form of language. It seems to be necessary to study the blend of orthographic input with positive and negative evidences and check what Young-Sholton (1995) considers as metalinguistic awareness. Therefore, the present study can have both theoretical and pedagogical significance.

The results to be achieved through this study can enhance our understanding of the importance of the principles and parameters of UG, and how new values are being set. Is it necessary to take some special measures on providing materials for teaching pronunciation, or just providing it orally is adequate and sometimes necessary? Syllabus and curriculum designers as well as material developers can benefit from the results of this study in organizing and developing their materials. Furthermore, the findings of this study can give them some insights to find the right methods of putting the input forward for the learners when teaching pronunciation.

1.3. The Organization of the Study

The current study is basically concerned with the evaluation of the effects of different inputs on the phonological acquisition of sound segments in English. The acquisition of the allophones of the consonant /l/ by Persian-speaking learners of English as a foreign language is under study and it is aimed to investigate the role of inputs and a good cue on their acquisition. This study consists of five chapters.

Chapter one is concerned with a brief introduction and a general overview of the area of the investigation done in the study. It introduces the purpose, the statement of the questions and hypotheses of the study. The key terms are provided in the last part of the chapter.

In **Chapter two** is a review of the related literature. This chapter covers the main studies on the effects of different inputs on phonological acquisition of sound segments. Some theories about Subset-principle, Asymmetry Hypothesis and good cues are explained in detail. In addition, the allophones of the consonant /l/ are examined phonetically and phonologically in both languages.

Chapter three introduces and discusses the methodology of this study. It includes the description of the subjects participating in this experiment, and also materials and procedures.

Chapter four deals with the description of raw data and the results, which have been analyzed by means of Statistical Package of Social Science, (SPSS)

version 9.0. Descriptive statistics, ANOVA test, Scheffe test multiple comparisons and Univariate are carried out in the analysis of the results.

Chapter five discusses and comments on the results. It consists of the conclusion, theoretical and pedagogical implications, and suggestions for further research.

1.4. Key Terms

Compensatory lengthening phenomenon: it states that the loss of a segment is incomplete until the time it took before it was deleted is preserved in a neighboring segment. This phenomenon always occurs in the case of segments deleted from the rime, but it never occurs in the case of segments which are deleted from onset. (Gussenhoven and Jacobs 1998)

Good cue (or trigger): partially or fully analyzed input that determines which parameter setting is adopted. (White, 2003)

OEHS Parameter: a phonetic property of the input, namely liquid devoicing constitutes a good cue for the resetting of Onset of an Empty-Headed Syllable. (Stele 2001)

Principles and Parameters of UG: UG includes invariant principles that are generally true across languages, and parameters allow variation from language to language. (White, 2003)