Pronunciation Errors of Some Consonants in Iranian Learners of English: Optimality Theory

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Abstract
One of language learning difficulties for Persian speaking learners is the pronunciation of sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue. These sounds include English consonants /w/, /θ/, /ð/, and /ŋ/. Due to the interference of the first language (L1) and the second language (L2), most Persian speaking learners replace the unfamiliar sound in L2 with a similar one in L1. This research, adopting a descriptive-analytic approach, aims to investigate the substitution of each English consonant with their corresponding consonants in Persian through argumentation around their constraints and ranking of Optimality theory in order to avoid interference in the later stages of language learning. To this end, 50 seventh-graders (middle school students) were randomly-selected from those who had not previously attended any English class outside school. Then they were asked to read 10 sentences containing at least 2 words with one of the English consonants /w/, /θ/, /ð/ or /ŋ/. The results show that these students substitute English consonants /w/, /θ/, /ð/, and /ŋ/ with their corresponding counterparts in Persian [v], [t], [d], and [ŋ], respectively. In some cases, depending on the consonant position in the syllable, they are replaced by another similar consonants in Persian, as [s] and [z] instead of /θ/ and /ð/ at coda position.

Keywords: Pronunciation Errors, Consonant Substitution, Iranian Learners of English, Optimality Theory

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