THE ROLE OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE IN PRONUNCIATION

Ana Marilza Bittencourt*

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Contrastive Analysis was developed and practised in the 1950s and 1960s as an application of Structural Linguistics to language teaching and based on the behaviourist view of learning. It held that learning was basically a process of forming automatic habits and that errors should therefore result from first language habits interfering with the learners attempts to learn new linguistic behaviours. The psychological foundation of contrastive analysis (CA) is Transfer Theory. CA took the position that a learner's first language 'interferes' with his/her acquisition of the second language, and that it therefore is the major obstacle to successful mastery of the new language.

CA is the comparison of the linguistic system of the two languages, for example, the sound system or the grammatical system, and is based on the following assumptions:

a) the main difficulties in learning a new language are caused by interference from the first language.

b) these difficulties can be predicted by contrastive analysis.

c) teaching materials can make use of CA to reduce the effects of interference.

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* Professora do Departamento de Letras Estrangeiras Modernas da Universidade Federal de Santa Maria.

Language Transfer

There are two processes of Language Transfer:

a) *Positive transfer* - refers to the automatic use of the first language (L1) structure in the second language (L2) performance when the structures in both languages are the same, resulting in correct utterances. For example, the use of Portuguese plural markers *'-s and -es'* on English nouns should yield correct English plural nouns (eg *menino-s* and *cruz-es* in Portuguese; *girl-s* and *cross-es* in English) if positive transfer were operating in L2 production.

b) *Negative transfer or interference* - is the use of a native-language pattern or rule which leads to an 'error' or inappropriate form in the target language. For example, in Portuguese the adjectives are usually placed after the noun or pronoun, and agree in gender, number and case with the noun; and in English most adjectives come in attributive position, ie, they can be used before a noun. A few adjectives function as complements, in predicative position (after the verbs: be, become, seem etc.).

According to the CA hypothesis, therefore, Portuguese speaking learners should tend to say "the girl smart" - "the girls smarts" instead of "the smart girl(s)", when attempting to communicate in English.

Following this reasoning, linguists thought a comparison of a learner's L1 and L2 - Constrastive Analysis - should reveal areas of difficulty of L2 students, thereby providing teachers and developers of L2 materials with specific guidelines for lesson planning.

In the 50s and 60s Interference Theory provided the basis for CA. CA Hypothesis claimed that all L2 errors were due to interference. Although this notion was useful in pointing out some errors, it could never truly predict nor explain all errors, as many errors derive from the strategies employed by the learners in language acquisition, and from the mutual interference of items within the target language.

Causes of interference

The less a bilingual the speaker is, the more interference there will be when he attempts to communicate with speakers of the target language. Some possible explanations of interlingual errors (those that reflect the L1) "are environmental":

1. Learners will fall back on their L1 if they are forced to use the L2 before they are ready. Thus, environmental conditions that result in premature use of the L1 such as pressure to perform or

lack of natural L2 exposure, may result in interlingual errors.

2. The use of timed translation tasks to elicit language also increases the number of interlingual errors.
3. The first language has a substantial influence on the second language mainly in the area of pronunciation, especially for adults and beginning level children. Mario Mascherpe[1] points out four areas of difficulty faced by Portuguese speakers when learning English:

a) Phonological errors - In English there are consonantal sounds that are not part of the sound system of Portuguese, such as: / /, /ʃ/, /č/, /ǰ/, /h/, /ŋ/.

b) Phonetic errors - Some phonemes are comparable in both Portuguese and in English, but their places of articulation are not the same, eg /t d/ are alveolar in English, but dental in Portuguese.

c) Allophonic errors - corresponding phonemes in both languages present partially similar and partially different allophonic structures. English [p t k], for instance are aspirated in initial position in stressed syllables, while in Portuguese /p t k/ present only one allophone.

d) Distributional errors - there are contrasts in the distribution of corresponding phonemes in both languages. English /m/ occurs in word final position, while Portuguese /m/ does not occur in such a position.

In the area of grammar, including syntax and morphology, interference from the mother tongue plays a role in second language learning. For example, the incorrect English sencente *I her see*, produced according to the word order of Portuguese, instead of the correct English sentence I see her.

In the area of morphology the interference factor is probably less important than at other levels of structure, this kind of interference is more related to the generalization of rules. Morphological errors result in the learner making up a wrong word, very much like a small child acquiring his first language. For example, The boy *gived* the money/ he *speaked*, etc.

Portuguese has plural forms in the adjectives and agreement between the noun and the adjective that modifies it, but English marks its plural only in the noun, never in the adjective. Brazilian students tend to apply

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[1] MASCHERPE, Mario. *Análise Comparativa dos Sistemas Fonológicos do Inglês e do Português*. Tese de Doutorado. Universidade de São Paulo, 1970.

the Portuguese rule in this case, as for instance: The *intelligents* boys are always *readies*.

The most common errors made by Brazilian students in the area of grammar are:

a) She's a student, *your* name is Mary.
The reason for this error is that in Portuguese the possessive adjectives do not agree with the possessor: Ela é uma estudante, seu nome é Maria.

b) Shut the door after *to leave*.
The -ing form is used after prepositions in English but not in Portuguese.

c) We listened to *new* Tony's songs.
In English the adjectives precede the nouns, but not in Portuguese.
Researchers have found that like L1 leaners' errors, most of the errors L2 learners make indicate they are gradually building an L2 rule system. These errors are indicators of progress rather than failure, ie the learners are still in the process of learning the second language.

PHONOLOGICAL ERRORS

In no area of language does interference come from the native language more abviously than in the sound system.

It has been said that *"Almost everyone learns the sound system patterns of a language perfectly as a child, and yet, almost no one can learn the sound patterns of a language perfectly as an adult."*[2]

The age is a powerful determinant of success in accent acquisition, and all confirm that puberty is an important turn point with respect to this aspect of language learning - pronunciation. *"The younger we learn a foreign language, the more likely that we will have a native-like pronunciation."*[3]

While some adults do achieve very high levels of proficiency in pronouncing a second language they seem to be the exception rather than the rule. The older the person, the more difficult it is to combat the

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[2] SCOVEL, T. Foreign Accents, Language Acquisition and Cerebral Dominance. *Language Learning*, 19: 245-54, 1969.

[3] PATKOVSKI, M. The Sensitive Period for the Acquisition of Syntax in a Second Language. *Language Learning* 30: 449-72.

interference coming from the native system, and the more it must be a matter of directed, conscious effort.

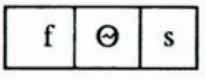
Many studies indicate that children are more successful than adults in learning a second language. They are not however always faster. Several studies suggest that adults seem to progress faster especially in the very early stages.

Lenneberg[4] hypothesized that the development of specialization of functions in the left and right sides of the brain - "cerebral dominance" or "lateralization" - begins in childhood and completes at puberty. Puberty is the time when foreign accent emerges and when automatic acquisition from mere exposure to a given language seems to disappear. Lenneberg and Scovel both noted the coincidence of the lateralization by puberty hipothesis and the age of the emerge of foreign accent.

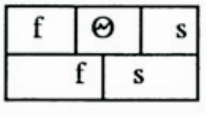
Every language has a different number of "boxes" for sounds and these boxes are arranged differently. When we hear our own language we hear the sounds and we put each one into the right box.

In Portuguese, for example, we have boxes for /s/ and /f/ but we do not have the *th* sound - /Θ/ /ð/.

The main problem of English pronunciation is to build a new set of boxes corresponding to the sounds of English, and to break down the arrangement of boxes which the habits of our own language - Portuguese - has so strongly built up. We do this by establishing new ways of hearing, new ways of using our speech organs, new speech habits. For example, three of the English boxes contain the sounds at the beginning of the words *fin, thin,* and *sin* that is, /f/, /Θ/ and /s/. Like this:



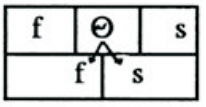
Portuguese has boxes which are similar to the English ones for /f/ and /s/, but it does not have a special box for /Θ /. And we can picture this in the following way:



When a Brazilian learner hears the English th-sound /Θ / he has to put it in one of his own boxes, his habits force him to do so, and he has

[4] LENNEBERG, E. *Biological Foundations of Language*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1967.

no special *th* box /Θ /, so he puts it into either the /f/ box or the /s/ box:



In other words, he hears the /Θ / as either /f/ or /s/; a funny /f/ or a funny /s/, no doubt, but he has nowhere else to put it. And in speaking the same thing happens: if he has to say *thin*, he has no /Θ / box to go to, so he goes to the nearest box available to him, either the /f/ or the /s/, and he says /fIn/ or /sIn/.

As teachers, we need to do a great deal of hard work in order to help our students to get good English pronunciation, even if they have no great talent for languages.

The Contrastive Analysis of the Phonological systems of the learner's two languages is a useful predictor of a substantial portion of the phonological performance of L2 learners, in particular that of adults and begnning level children.

Most of the valid CA evidence seems to be phonological, and *"studies of the second language acquisition have tended to imply that CA may be most predictive at the level of phonology and least predictive at the syntactic level".*[5]

One of the most influential works based on the concept of interference was Uriel Weinreich's *Languages in Contrast in which he proposed various types of interference, defined as "deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language"*[6] In phonology he divided interference into phonic, phonotactic, and suprasegmental interference.

Weinreich devides phonic interference into four subtypes:

Sound Substitution - (e.g. English /Θ / for Portuguese /f/, /s/, /t/.

Underdifferentiation - when two sounds are not distinguished in the Portuguese system but are distinguished in the English system (e.g. Portuguese has no [t']-[t] distinctions as English does).

Overdifferentiation - when the primary system has oppositions which the secondary system does not (e.g. a Portuguese speaker may think of /n/ and / ŋ / as the same phoneme when speaking English.

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[5] RICHARDS, J. *Error Analysis: Perspective on Second Language Learning*. London: Longman, 1974.

[6] WEIREICH, V. *Languages in Contrast: Findings and Problems*. The Hague: Mouton, 1953.

Reinterpretation of Distinctions - when a bilingual distinguishes phonemes of the secondary system by features which in that system are merely concomitant or redundant, but which are relevant to the primary system.

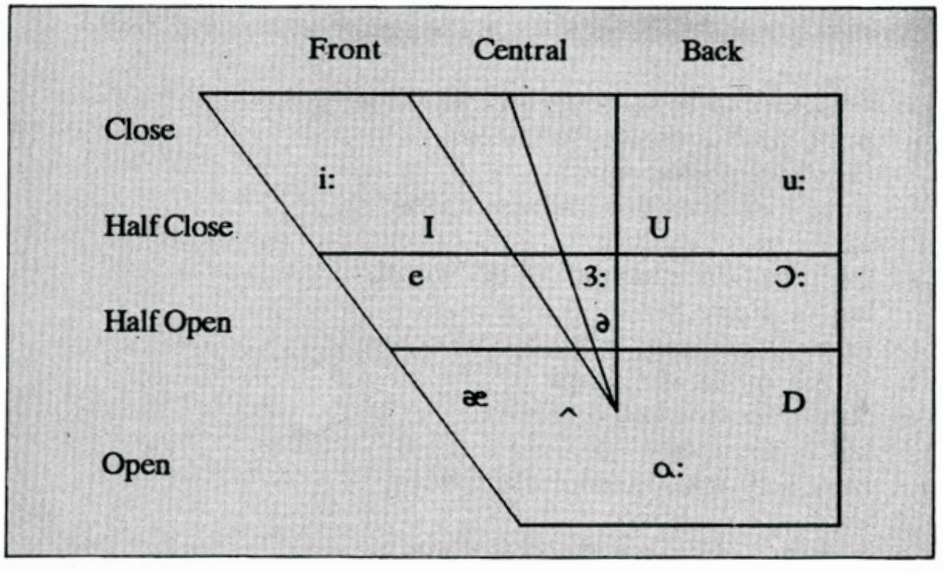
Weinreich's use of Phonotactic and Suprasegmental interference is conventional. For example, Portuguese speakers typically insert a vowel after the phonemes /p t k d g f v s z m n/ when they occur at the end position of a word. So, instead of /kap/ a Brazilian learner tends to say /ka pi/ for 'cap'. In the case of suprasegmental interference, in Portuguese words may be stressed on the ultimate (aqui), or the penultimate (casa), or the antepenultimate (árvore) syllable. English is known as a "Stress-Timed Language"; and the place of stress varies according to affixation, sentence context, emphasis, speed of utterance, etc.

Contrasting Sound Systems

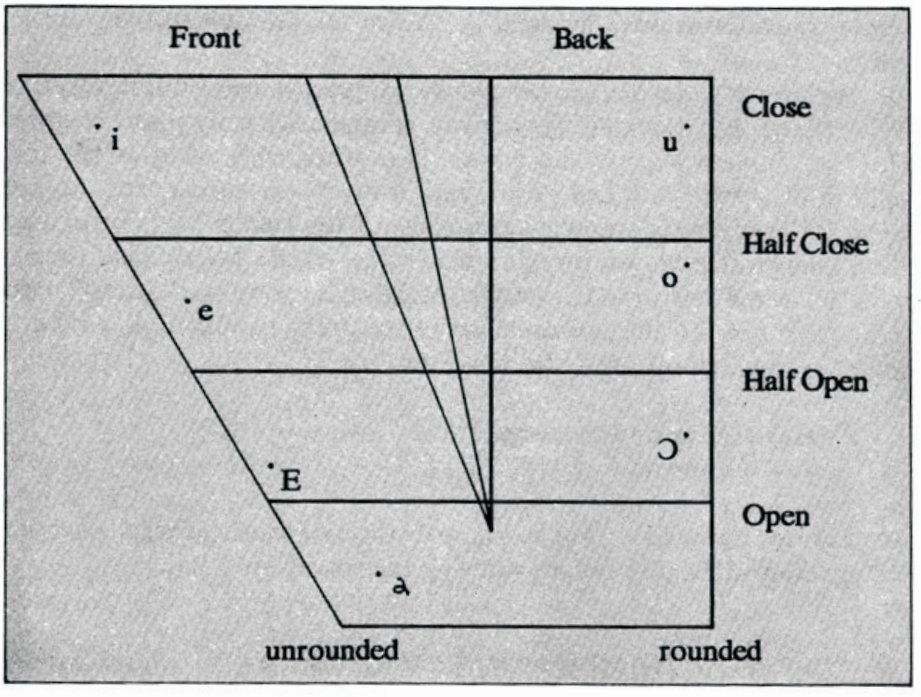
vowels

Let us now draw the vowel and the consonant charts of both Portuguese and English before studying the sounds in detail.

THE ENGLISH VOWEL CHART



THE PORTUGUESE VOWEL CHART



Portuguese Vowel Sounds - Particle Perspective

In Portuguese there are seven oral vocalic phonemes:

/i/ front, close unrounded oral vowel;
ex: irmão, arrime, aqui.

/e/ front, half-close, unrounded oral vowel;
ex: ele, mesa, você

/E/ front, half-open, unrounded oral vowel;
ex: ela, alegre, pé

/a/ central, open, unrounded/neutral oral vowel;
ex: asa, tal, lá, alto, etapa

/u/ back, close, rounded oral vowel
unido, aturo, nu

/o/ back, half-close, rounded oral vowel
ex: oração, cor, avô

/ɔ/ back, half-close, rounded oral vowel;
ex: hora, avó, costa.

Vowel Allophones - Wave Perspective

Front Allophones

/i/ has three allophones:
- |i| - ri, mastigar
- |i| - rápido, juri, jure, verde, parte, segundo
- |y| - baile, caixa, horário

/e/ has only one allophone - |e|

/E/ has only one allophone - |E|

Central Allophones

The central oral vowel /a/ presents the following allophones:
- |a| - pá, pato, falar (not followed by /m,n,ñ/)
- |ɔ| - esquina, ela, cama, cano, banho

Back Allophones

The back oral vowel /u/ has three allophones:
- |U| - unir, espátula, fogo, claro
- |u| - útil, altura, tatu, cultivar
- |w| - quatro, água, mau, guarda, cauda

The back oral vowel /o/ has one allophone - |o|

English Vowel Sounds

According to Gimson[7] there are twelve simple vowels:
The RP Simple Vowels

/i:/ front, close, unrounded, long and tense vowel;
ex: sea, cheese, piece, be

/I/ front, half close, unrounded, short, lax vowel- (centralized)
ex: sit, fill, need, symbol, ladies, village, private

/e/ front, half-open/half-close, unrounded, short, lax vowel-
(a bit tenser than /I/;
ex: set, dead, many, went

/æ/ front, half open, unrounded, short, lax vowel- (tenser than /e/)
ex: pat, bad, sad, hand, rash, man, plaid

/^/ central, open/half-open, unrounded, short and lax sound
ex: sun, son, country, does, flood

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[7] GIMSON, A.C. *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English.* 3rd edition. London: Edward Arnold, 1980

/ɑ:/ back-centralized, open, unrounded, long and actually tense sound
ex: pass, after, part, car, heart, clerk, sergeant, half
/D/ back, open, rounded short sound
ex: was, dog, cough, because, solve, yacht
/Ɔ:/ back, half-open/half-close, medium rounded, long and tense vowel
ex: cord, saw, bought, all, water, more, door, board, four
/U/ back, half-close/close, loosely rounded, short and lax vowel
ex: put, wolf, good, could
/u:/ back, close, rounded, long, tense vowel sound
ex: food, do, lose, group, rude, blue, shoe
/3:/ central, half-close/half-open, unrounded, lax vowel
ex: long |3:| - fur, burn, bird, urge
reduced |3| - first, earth, worse, church
/ə/ central, half-open/half-close, unrounded-(neutral),
very short and lax vowel sound.

All vowels in the RP English present allophonic variations determined by the type of consonants following:

/i:/ - [i]; /I/ - [I]	/3:/ - [3]
/u:/ - [u]; /U/ - [U]	/e/ - [e]
/a:/ - [a]; /æ/ - [æ]	/ə/ - [ə], [3]
/Ɔ:/ - [Ɔ]; /D/ - [D]	/^/ - [^]

The criteria to analyse the vowel sounds

The vowel sounds are the most difficult sounds to be learnt by the Portuguese speaking people because Portuguese is a language with a relatively simple vowel system, so the learners need to devote considerable time to the English complex vowel system.

Teachers have to call attention to the four criteria used to analyse the vowels:

a) The place of articulation - front, central and back in both languages.
b) Height of the tongue towards the palate - close, half-close half-open and open.
c) Shape of lips - rounded, unrounded (neutral and spread position), rounded (closely rounded, medium rounded, loosely rounded).
d) Duration of the vowel - short, long and reduced
lax, tense - (muscular tension).

Learners with different linguistic backgrounds will, of course, experience different difficulties in appreciating the distinctive elements of English. It is for this reason that a teacher should be aware of the

phonetic and phonological caracteristics of the mother tongue of his students (and their particular variety of the first language). By contrasting the features of the two languages, he will be able to predict the problems which will arise and on which he should concentrate his drills; he will also be able to make use of phonetic resemblances between the two languages which may not be readily evident to the learners.

In order to teach the vowel sound system of English to the students the teacher should consider the three perspectives quoted by Pike: Particle, Wave, Field.

Particle is the basic perspective. The phoneme is seen as a unit, and is defined in terms of *articulations* and represented by I.P.A. symbols. The IPA chart demonstrates an isolated description of each phoneme, and it is seen and described in a static perspective.

In the Wave Pespective the phoneme is dynamic, the phonemes fit into different ways producing allophonic variants according to the adjacent sounds, place in the syllable or word, and accent non accented syllables or words. For example, the phoneme /i:/ has two allophones: in *sea* |si:|, and in *seat* |sit|.

Field Perspective means that the phoneme must be seen in terms of its relationship to other phonemes, relying on the criterion of ***minimal pairs***. For example, there are four criteria to classify the minimal pairs - /i:/ and /ɪ/

/i:/	/ɪ/
a) Both are front they share the same feature.	
b) It is close	It is between close and half-close
c) The lips are spread	The lips are neutral
d) It is a long sound	It is a short sound

Of course, these three, perspectives are used to study both consonants and vowels.

In English, the vowels can be nasalized when in contact with a nasal consonant; it is the same in Portuguese.

CONSONANT SOUNDS

The English Consonants
There are seven (7) Stop/Plosive
/p,b/; /t,d/; /k,g/; |?|
There are two affricates:
/č,ǰ/ = /t ,dʒ/
There are nine fricatives:
/f,v/; /Θ,ð/; /s,z/; /ʃ,ʒ/; /h/
There are three nasals:
/m/, /n/, /ŋ/
There is one lateral:
/l/
There are three glides:
/r/, /w/, /y/.
= 25

The Portuguese Consonants
There are six Plosives
/p,b/; /t,d/; /k,g/
There are no affricates
in Portuguese.
There are six fricatives
/f,v/; /s,z/; /ʃ,ʒ/
There are three nasals:
/m/, /n/, /ñ/
There are two laterals:
/l/, /ʎ/
There are three glides
/r/+(vibrant), /w/, /y/
=21

ENGLISH CONSONANTAL CHART

MANNER OF ARTICULATION		PLACE OF ARTICULATION							
		bilabial labial	labial-	dental dental	alveo-lar	alveol. palatal	post alveol.	velar	glottal
STOP	-vl	p			t			k	?
	+vd	b			d			g	
Affricate	-vl					č			
	+vd					ǰ			
Fricative	-vl		f	Θ	s	š			h
	+vd		v	ð	z	ž			
Nasal	+	m			n			ŋ	
Lateral	+				l				
Glide	+	w				y	r	(w)	

PORTUGUESE CONSONANTAL CHART

MANNER OF ARTICULATION	PLACE OF ARTICULATION						
		bilabial	labial-dental	dental	alveolar	palatal	velar
STOP	~~vl~~ + vd	p b		t d			k g
Fricative	- vl + vd		f v		s z	š ž	
Nasal	+	m		n		ñ	
Lateral	+				l	ʎ	
Glide	+	w			r	y	ẏ

Contrasting the charts

By contrasting the charts we observe that English and Portuguese phonemes /t,d/ have diferent points of articulation In English they have an alveolar point of articulation, while in Portuguese they are dental.

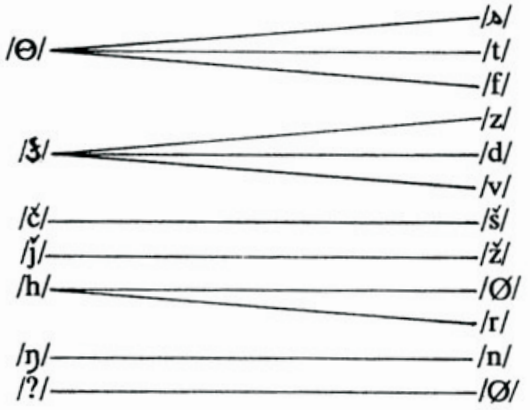
The phoneme /n/ is alveolar in English and (lingua) dental in Portuguese.

The phoneme /r/ is post alveolar in English, but alveolar in Portuguese.

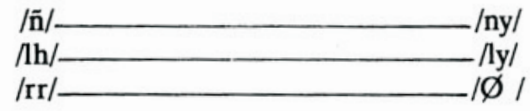
In English the phonemes /š,ž/ = (/ʃ,ʒ/) are alveolar-palatal, while in Portuguese they are palatal.

In English there are consonant sounds that do not occur in Portuguese: /Θ ð h č ǰ ŋ ʔ /.

The Brazilian students will have problems hearing as well as producing such sounds. They will tend to substitute some other phonemes from their native stock which are close to their point of articulation. For example:



Portuguese has three consonants that do not occur in English: /ɲʎɾ̃/ = (/ñ,lh,rr/). English speaking people tend to substitute such sounds for:



Consonant Allophones

One feature shared by English voiceless stops /p t k/ which the corresponding Portuguese plosives do not present is aspiration in syllable-initial position. The absence of aspiration will cause an obvious foreign accent, without necessarily interfering with comprehension. For example:

[t^haim] - /taim/ for 'time'.
[p^hIn] - /pIn/ for 'pin'.
[k^ha p] - /ka pi/ for 'cap'.

The phoneme /t/ presents four diferent allophones: [t^h] - aspirated; [t] - unaspirated; [t^-] - unreleased; and [Ɒ] - (American English flap).

The allophone [t^h], as seen above, does not exist in Portuguese. Portuguese speakers will not aspirate it, and use [t] whenever [t^h] should occur. So, whenever theaching the allophone [t^h] to Portuguese speakers, besides emphaizing that its articulation in English is an alveolar one, special attention should be given to aspiration, because they will not be able to hear it.

[t] occurs in word-initial position after /s/, e.g. still [stIl], in syllable-initial position before unstressed vowel, e.g. butter [bʌt ə (r)], and in word-final position e.g. cat [kæt].

Unreleased [t˭] occurs before another stop, e.g. football [fʊt˭bɔ:ɬ], and in final position in free-variation with [t^h] and [t], e.g. boat [bəʊt^h] - [bəʊt].

The flap [Ð] occurs between a stressed and an unstressed vowel. In British /t/ remains "unvoiced" between vowels, however in American English an intervocalic /t/ has a very "light voiced" pronunciation, and it is pronounced somewhat like /d/, without aspiration, and very rapidly. Ex: water [wɔ:tə(r)], [wɔÐər].

The africates [č] and [ǰ] do not occur as phonemes in Portuguese. They are allophones of |t| and |d|.

[c] as a Portuguese allophone occurs before /i/, ex.: tia [čia]. So, the English word *team* will be pronounced *[čimi] instead of |t^{h}i:m|. There also would be the tendency not do distinguish *tease* from *cheese*, by Portuguese speakers, *[čizi]; instead of [t^{h}i:z] [tʃi:z].

The English voiced velar plosive /g/ presents two allophones: [g] and [g˭], while in Portuguese we have only one allophone [g], which occurs in word-initial and word-medial position: *gato* [gatu]; *agosto* [agostu].

The allophone [g˭] occurs in final position and before another stop. For example, *tag* [t^{h}æg] and *leg* [leg˭]; *lagged* [læg˭d]. The allophone [g˭] does not occur in Portuguese, but Brazilian students will have no difficulty in pronouncing this sound correctly. The only problem will be the insertion of /i/ after it in final position.

The phoneme /l/ has three allophones in English:

Light or clear [l], with a relatively front owel resonance, before vowels and /y/. For example, *leave* (sord-initial) [li:v], silly [sIlI], and word final, intervocalic in context: *feel it* [fi:lIt].

Dark [ɬ], with a relatively back vowel resonance: word final, after vowel: *feel* - [fi:ɬ]; after a vowel, before consonant: *help* [help˭]; syllabic: *middle* [mIdɬ].

Voiceless [l̥], following accented (aspirated) /p,k/; (less considerable devoicing occurs after /s,f, Θ , š/ or weakly accented /p t k/. For example, *plane* [p^{h}leIn]; *fly* [flaI].

There will be no phonological error concerning /l/ because it occurs in both languages.

Phonotactic combinations

Some English consonant groups (consonant clusters) which do not occur in Portuguese:

/ Θr, sr, st, sp, sm, sk, sn, sf, sl, dw, kw, tw, sw, hw, Θw, fy, ky, my, by, py, vy, hy, str, skr, spr, spl, skw / - at initial-position.

Consonant Clusters at final-position:

/ nd, nt, st, ns, nts, ld, ks, lf, nk, kt, nǰ, lv, lt, sk, lp, ls, lk, lΘ , mp, nč, ft, sp, lm, lǰ, lb, lš, dz, mps, nz, rts, rΘ , rn, etc... /

The role of intonation

Teaching should be obviously concentrated on certain basic characteristcs of Pronunciation which seem sufficient specific to English to constitute priority for the great majority of learners.

The *Stress-Timed* rhythm of English uterance (be it a single word or connected speech) with the related obscuration of weak syllables is the prime distinguishing feature of English, with no exact parallel in any other language. The problems of English accentuation are great and will require prolonged emphasis. The difference between *strong* and *weak form* has to be emphasized and *Intonation* makes a most important contribution to the accentuation patterning of English - The use of *Pitch* as a prime factor in making a syllable a word prominent.

Students should be aware of the importance of Intonation from the very beginning, because it makes a most important contribution to the accentuation patterning of English.

As we have seen L1 does have significant influence on the L2, and the contrastive analysis of the phonological system is a useful predictor of L2 language performance. Most of the L2 learners process the foreign sound system through their L1 system, ie using L1 phonology as a base. However, the interference of L1 in Phonologuy has some shortcomings:

1) Interference does not always occur for a given phenomenon. Thus CA can not predict errors, but rather can explain errors only after the fact.

2) Interference can not explain why speakers produce sounds which occur neither in the L1 nor L2.

3) There is considerable variation in pronunciation from speakers to speakers. Interference can not predict or explain these differences because it does not consider stylistic variation in the L1 or the L2

4) Interference Theory can not explain how or why a speaker pronunciation gradually improves over time. It implies that a speaker makes a categorical jump from a L1 substitution to the L2 without any intermediate (i. developmental stages). However, since intermediate developmental stages do occur, they are outside the realm of interference theory.

It is evident that interference of the mother tongue does play a role in second language acquisition, but it is not the only interfering factor.

Recent research on Second Language (L2) Acquisition has undergone substantial changes by shifting its focus of interest away from an analysis of linguistic structures alone, concentrating more on the learner himself or, rather on the process of learning. It had become obvious that one of the major shortomings in Contrastive Analysis as well as in the usual kind of error studies is that they lack thorough investigation of factors which determine the kind of approach a learner may take to acquire a second language. This implies that it is more fruitful to study the process of learning itself instead of merely analysing its output. It is by now widely accepted that the learner takes an active part in the learning process and does not merely get trapped in structural gaps which linguists may find when comparing the source language and the target language.

If we agree that there is a common language acquisition system for both second and first language acquisition we have to admit that the first language is no longer the villain in second language learning, and we can conclude that most of the error made by a second language learner are similar to the errors made when a child learns its first language - they are therefore developmental errors. However, there are some aspects of L2 learning which need to be emphasized, for the starting point is not the same.