**Abstract**

Every language chooses and uses a limited number of vowels and consonants from the list of all the sounds humans can produce. This means that some sounds are absent in every language. It turns into a problem when one is learning a new language. For Iranian EFL learners, the three consonants /ɹ/, /ɻ/, and /w/ which are totally absent in Persian are really problematic. Therefore, this paper aims at investigating the effectiveness of intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic approaches for the instruction of these consonants to Iranian high school students. The participants were 24 grade two high school students, studying in two classes in Shahrakord. In one class, these were taught using intuitive-imitative approach, and in the other using analytic-linguistic approach, then both groups have been audio-recorded reading a text containing words with these consonants. The results of the independent samples t-test indicated that there was no significant difference between /ɹ/, /ɻ/, and /w/ mean production scores of the intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic groups. However, the authors suggest starting teaching with intuitive-imitative approach to make students more motivated to pay attention, and then continuing with analytic-linguistic approach to make students acquire the exact pronunciation.

**Keywords**: Pronunciation; Intuitive-imitative approach; Analytic-linguistic approach; Problematic consonants

**1. Introduction**

Certainly, pronunciation deserves considerable attention as well as other language skills and components. It is “a crucial ingredient of learning of oral skills in a second language” (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010, p. 983), and plays a principle role in getting meaning across transactionally and interactionally (Schmitt, 2002, p. 219). In
spite of its profound importance, pronunciation is one of the woefully neglected areas in second language teaching. Kelly (1969) refers to it as the Cinderella area of foreign language teaching. According to him, pronunciation contrary to grammar and vocabulary which have been widely focused by linguists since long ago, has been systematically studied just shortly before the twentieth century. Baker (1992) mentions that advanced students find themselves capable of improving all aspects of their English proficiency, except their pronunciation (cited in Yazdani Moghadam & Kiaee). Examining language learners’ speech, one easily finds that many language learners are accustomed to mispronunciation. As mentioned by Kelly (2000, p. 11), a consideration of how learners’ pronunciation errors can inhibit successful communication forms a basis for the necessity of dealing with pronunciation in the classroom.

Studies conducted by Brown (1992), Clawi (1993), Fraser (2000), and Yates (2001) reveal that many language teachers tend to avoid dealing with pronunciation for they lack confidence, skill, and knowledge. Additionally, these studies show that curricula, methodology, and the lack of appropriate materials cause inadequacies of pronunciation teaching and learning (cited in Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010, p. 983). In the same line, the English language lacks a one to one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. While English writing deals with five vowel letters and 21 consonant letters, spoken English deals with 12 vowels, 8 diphthongs, and 24 consonant sounds. This highlights the necessity for pronunciation teaching. Moreover, because every language chooses a limited number of vowels and consonants from the list of all the sounds humans can produce (Schmitt, 2002, p. 223), some sounds are absent in every language, and it turns into a problem for language learners. Language learners have a tendency to apply the sounds of their mother tongue in learning a second language, leading to interlingual errors (Celce-Murica, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). This issue also, in turn, emphasizes the importance of teaching pronunciation.

The learning of English pronunciation has long been a subject of research. Celce-Murica et al. (1996) have illustrated the history of teaching English pronunciation, since second language teaching started, as follows:

| Years               | Approach                                      | Definition                                                                 |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| late 1800s & late 1900s | Direct Method                                | Teachers provided L2 learners with a model for native-like speech. By listening and then imitating the modeler, L2 learners improved their pronunciation |
| 1940s-1950s         | Audio-Lingual Method in the US & Oral Approach in the UK | Pronunciation was taught explicitly from start, and L2 learners imitated or repeated after their teacher or a recording model. |
| 1960s               | Cognitive Approach                            | This de-emphasized pronunciation in favor of grammar and vocabulary           |
| 1970s               | Silent Way                                    | L2 learners focused on the sound system without having to learn a phonetic alphabet. Attention was on the accuracy of sounds and structures of the L2 from the outset. |
|                     | Community Language Learning                  | The pronunciation syllabus was primarily student-initiated and designed. The approach was imitative. |
|                     | Communicative Approach                        | The ultimate goal was communication. Teaching pronunciation was urgent and it was necessary in oral communication. Techniques to teach |
Mid-late 1970s (1980s-today) pronunciation were listening and imitating, phonetic training, minimal pair drill.

20th century Grammar Translation & Reading-Based Approaches Oral communication was not the primary goal of L2 instruction. Therefore, little attention was given to speaking and almost none to pronunciation.

Naturalistic Methods Total Physical Response L2 learners began to speak when they were ready. L2 teachers were tolerant of L2 learners’ errors.

Natural Approach Natural Approach The initial focus on listening without pressure to speak gave L2 learners opportunity to internalize sounds.

Today New Directions The use of fluency-building activities, accuracy-oriented exercises, and adaptation of authentic materials is dominant.

Chen (2007, cited in Lee, 2008, p. 3) presents a general historical view of the role of pronunciation in second language acquisition (SLA). Her illustration is shown in table 2:

Table 2. A historical view of the role of pronunciation in SLA

| 1940-1960s | 1970s-1980s | Late 1980s-present |
|------------|-------------|--------------------|
| The teaching of pronunciation was greatly stressed. | The teaching of pronunciation was largely ignored. | Pronunciation was a key ingredient in the development of communicative competence. |
| Behavioristic audio-lingual methods used imitation drills, pattern practice, and dialogue memorization. | Communicative approaches focused more on fluency than form | A more balanced approach that valued both accuracy and fluency was adopted |

According to Celce-Murica et al. (1996, cited in Lee, 2008, p. 2), there are three main approaches to teaching pronunciation including the intuitive-imitative approach, the analytic-linguistic approach, and the integrative approach. In the intuitive-imitative approach, it is assumed that “a student ability to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language will give rise to the development of an acceptable threshold of pronunciation without the intervention of any explicit information” (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010, p. 984). Particular technologies, such as audio-tapes, videos, computer-based programs, and websites, are used today for this approach. Meanwhile, in the analytic-linguistic approach, explicit intervention of pronunciation pedagogy is emphasized. The learners are provided with explicit information on pronunciation using phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, and vocal charts. The explicit information can be presented in different interactive speech software and websites (Lee, 2008). In the integrative approach, according to Lee (2008, p. 1), “pronunciation is viewed as an integral component of communication, rather than an isolated drill and practice sub-skill.” Lee also mentions that learners practice pronunciation within meaningful task-based activities, and pronunciation is taught to meet L2 learners’ particular needs. According to Morley (1994), there exists a dual-focus oral communicative program in this approach, in which the micro level instruction attends to linguistic competence, i.e., phonetic and phonological competence, via practice of segmental and supra segmental, and the macro level emphasizes the more global elements of communicability to improve discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence through using language for communicative purposes (cited in Lee, 2008).

Based on Celce-Murica, Brinton, and Goodwin’s categorization, the present study is aimed at investigating the effectiveness of intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic approaches toward teaching pronunciation. Since the absence of the consonants /t/, /d/, and /w/ in Persian has led to too much interlingual errors among Iranian language learners, this study is focused on the examination of the effectiveness of the afore-mentioned approaches in teaching these three consonants. Accordingly, the following null hypotheses are formulated:
1. There is no significant difference in the mean /T/ pronunciation scores for students taught through intuitive-imitative approach and those taught through analytic-linguistic approach.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean /Δ/ pronunciation scores for students taught through intuitive-imitative approach and those taught through analytic-linguistic approach.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean /w/ pronunciation scores for students taught through intuitive-imitative approach and those taught through analytic-linguistic approach.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants were 24 EFL grade-two high school students in the form of two classes, each with 12 students, studying in Shahrekord. They were all female and aged 16 years old.

2.2. Materials

The testing instrument used in this study was a text which was designed based upon the instructed material on the pronunciation of /T/, /Δ/, and /w/. It included six words containing /T/, 11 words containing /Δ/, and 15 words containing /w/. The participants were supposed to read the text. They were quite unconscious of the purpose of the study.

2.3. Procedure

The study participants were comprised of two grade-two high school classes. In class A, the consonants were taught through intuitive-imitative approach. Intuitive-imitative approach deals with listening and imitating the sounds and rhythms of the target language without explicit teaching. Thus, during the instruction, one of the researchers pronounced the consonants and familiar words containing them with the students listening to her. Then, the students were asked to repeat the sounds and words individually and altogether. Each student was corrected individually till her errors disappeared.

In class B, the consonants were taught through analytic-linguistic approach. In analytic-linguistic approach, the students are provided with explicit information on pronunciation, such as articulatory descriptions, phonetic alphabet and vocal charts (Lee, 2008). Accordingly, the articulatory descriptions of the consonants, such as the position of tongue and the role of teeth and lips as well as the phonetic symbols, were expressed explicitly. The students were asked to practice the sounds and words containing them individually and altogether, and their errors were corrected, explaining the articulation of mal-pronounced sounds to them.

One week after the instruction sessions finished, the participants were tested using a previously-designed text including words containing the instructed consonants. Being unconscious of the purpose of testing, the students were asked to read the text. Each student was audio recorded during reading, and the recorded voices were analyzed subsequently.

3. Results and discussion

The recorded voices were analyzed to gain insight into the effect of the two pronunciation teaching approaches on the students’ pronunciation. Rating the recorded voices, one point was awarded to each correct pronunciation of the consonants, and no point was considered for each wrong pronunciation. Thus, regarding the number of each consonant in the text, students’ mark on /T/, /Δ/, and /w/ pronunciation were calculated from a total of six, 11, and 15 points respectively. Having marked both class members’ performance, using Statistical Package
for Social Sciences (SPSS), independent samples \( t \) test was conducted to find whether there was any significant difference in the mean pronunciation scores on each consonant for the two groups of students.

Regarding the pronunciation of \(/T/\), both groups’ mean scores are shown in table 3:

| Group   | N   | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---------|-----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Imitative | 11  | 4.8182| 1.32802        | .40041          |
| Analytic | 11  | 4.0909| 1.64040        | .49460          |

To find whether there was a significant difference in the \(/T/\) pronunciation mean scores for the two groups, independent samples \( t \)-test was conducted. Table 4 represents the inferential statistics of the data:

| \( t \)  | df  | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
|---------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1.143   | 20  | .267            | .72777          | .63636               |

The probability value of the test was .267 which is above .05. Thus, it was concluded that there was no significant difference between the performances of the two groups on \(/T/\) pronunciation.

In case of \(/\Delta/\), both groups’ pronunciation mean scores were as follows:

| Group   | N   | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---------|-----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Imitative | 11  | 2.6364| 3.07482        | .92709          |
| Analytic | 11  | 2.4545| 1.75292        | .52853          |

To test the second null hypothesis, independent samples \( t \)-test was conducted. Table 6 shows the results:

| \( t \)  | df  | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
|---------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| .170    | 15.879 | .867          | .18182          | 1.06717              |

The probability value of the test was found to be .867, which is above .05. Hence, it was concluded that there was no significant difference between the performances of the two groups on \(/\Delta/\) pronunciation.

Rating the recordings, one attracting point was that, in case of the words “father, mother, brother” included in the text, it was seen that most participants of the both groups pronounced \(/d/\) instead of \(/\Delta/\) as a result of fossilization, additionally, some cases of both groups had correct pronunciation as a result of too much difference between the correct pronunciation and the wrong pronunciation they used to consider correct. In addition, considering the performances on \(/T/\) and \(/\Delta/\) pronunciation, both groups pronounced \(/T/\) more accurately than \(/\Delta/\), and a considerable number of subjects in the imitative group were found to have correct pronunciation of \(/T/\) and no correct pronunciation of \(/\Delta/\). During teaching, the imitative group was seen to have difficulty understanding the difference between \(/T/\) and \(/\Delta/\). While reading the text, some students (three students) of the imitative group had got confused and pronounced \(/T/\) and \(/\Delta/\) interchangeably. But the analytic group did not have the problem of pronouncing \(/T/\) instead of \(/\Delta/\) and vice versa. This indicates applying the imitative approach in teaching dentals is confusing for EFL students. Thus, in simultaneous teaching of the dentals in one session, the analytic approach may be more efficient for Iranian students.
Regarding /w/ pronunciation, the groups’ mean scores were as follows:

Table 7. Descriptive statistics

| Group   | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Imitative | 11 | 5.4545 | 6.75816        | 2.03766         |
| Analytic | 11 | 4.8182 | 5.09545        | 1.53634         |

To test the third null hypothesis, the researchers ran independent samples t-test. Table 6 represents the inferential statistics of the data:

Table 8. Independent-samples t-test

| t    | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
|------|----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| .249 | 20 | .806            | .63636          | 2.55194               |

The probability value of the test was found to be .806, which is above .05, indicating no significant difference between the groups’ performances on /w/ pronunciation.

Examining the students’ /w/ pronunciation, it was seen that two students of the imitative group who had a good quantity of correct pronunciation of /w/, could have had a better quality of rounding, if they have been taught through the analytic approach additionally.

4. Conclusion

The results of the independent sample t-tests indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the both groups on the pronunciation of the consonants /T/, /D/, and /w/. The researchers, during teaching through the intuitive-imitative approach, noticed high motivation to pay attention and try to learn among the students, as well as some confusion regarding the exact pronunciation of the consonants. Hence, they suggest starting teaching pronunciation with intuitive-imitative approach to create the necessary motivation and continuing with the analytic-linguistic approach to make students acquire the exact pronunciation.

Considering the absence of the aforementioned consonants in Persian and the widespread interlingual errors Iranian L2 learners make in their pronunciation, the findings of this study seem helpful in improving the efficacy of teaching pronunciation to Iranian learners. It is hoped that the results of the study could shed some light on the practice of teaching pronunciation and pave the way for students’ better management of pronunciation.

References

Baker, A. (1992). Ship or sheep: An intermediate pronunciation course. Cambridge University Press.
Brown, A. (1992). A survey of attitudes and teaching practices related to pronunciation teaching. Perth: AMES WA.
Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (1996). Teaching pronunciation. Cambridge University Press.
Chen, C. F. (2007). Computer assisted language learning and teaching. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from http://www.nkfust.edu.tw/nemchen/CALL/.
Claire, S. (1993). Pronunciation in the NSW Adult Migrant English Service: Current practice, future directions. Unpublished master’s thesis, University of Technology, Sydney.
Fraser, H. (2000). Coordinating improvements in pronunciation teaching for adult learners of English as a second language. Canberra: Department of Education, Training, and Youth Affairs.
Hismanoglu, M., & Hismanoglu, S. (2010). Language teachers’ preferences of pronunciation teaching techniques: Traditional or modern. Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2, 983-989.
Kelly, G. (1969). 25 centuries of language teaching. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
Kelly, G. (2000). How to teach pronunciation. Malaysia: Pearson Education Limited.
Lee, S. T. (2008). Teaching pronunciation of English using computer assisted learning software: An action research study in an institute of
technology in Taiwan. Doctoral dissertation, Australian Catholic University.

Morely, J. (1994). A multidimensional curriculum for speech-pronunciation instruction. In J. Morely (Ed.), Pronunciation pedagogy and theory: New views, new directions. (pp. 66-91). TESOL Inc, Virginia.

Schmitt, N. (2002). An introduction to applied linguistics. New York: Oxford University Press.

Yates, L. (2001). Teaching pronunciation in the AMEP: Current practice and professional development. AMEP Research Centre. Retrieved March 11, 2009, from http://www.nceitr.mg.edu.au/conference2001/index.html.