

PRONUNCIATION PROFICIENCY AND
THE AFFECTIVE FILTER - ATTITUDES AND STEREOTYPES
IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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0. INTRODUCTION. The theoretical bases of Krashen's model of second language acquisition (1981; 1982; 1985) include five hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis; the monitor hypothesis; the natural order hypothesis; the input hypothesis; and the affective filter hypothesis. The first three of these hypotheses are central to the organization of a language program using the natural approach (Krashen and Terrell (1983); that is, they form the underlying bases for a program whose purpose is to develop in beginning students as much communicative competency as possible in a beginning language course or series of beginning language courses. The latter two, the input and affective filter hypotheses, however, determine on a day-to-day basis what actually takes place in the second language classroom. In very general terms, the input hypothesis states that we must provide as much comprehensible input as possible for a student in the second language classroom, since within Krashen's theoretical framework, it is claimed that it is through and only through comprehensible input becoming comprehended input that language is acquired (not learned). The notion of the affective filter, originally presented in Dulay and Burt (1977), which is much less controversial, and valid for almost all teaching methodologies, states that the affective variables of motivation, self-confidence and anxiety (Krashen 1982) have a profound influence on language acquisition (not learning). The claim of the natural approach, then, is that students will acquire second languages best when they are in an environment which provides a maximally low (weak) affective filter, and a maximally high amount of comprehensible input.

A rather unusual and unexpected characteristic of all communicatively-based teaching methodologies, however, is the fact that

none of these current models makes any genuine effort to deal with the teaching of pronunciation in the second language classroom. It is particularly strange that proponents of the so-called proficiency movement, while placing a great deal of emphasis on linguistic accuracy in the nascent stages of second language acquisition (to avoid what they term fossilization) include no provision for the teaching of pronunciation in the classroom. (See, for example, Omaggio 1986.) After surveying different varieties of communicative methodologies, Terrell (1989:197) likewise arrives at the same conclusion stating that "Communicative approaches likewise have not known what to do with pronunciation".

It is not surprising that the role of pronunciation in communicatively-based classroom teaching methodologies is so ill-defined, since very little empirical research has been carried out addressing the question as to how or if pronunciation can or should be taught in the second language classroom. Purcell and Suter (1980), after surveying acquirers of English as a second language, concluded that specific classroom instruction aimed at pronunciation did little to enhance student performance in pronunciation accuracy. Also, Neufield (1979) suggests that specific drills and exercises aimed at accurate pronunciation are of very limited value and that the silent period advocated in the natural approach may be of far greater value in the acquisition of a second language sound system. In summarizing their views on the role of pronunciation in the second language acquisition process, Krashen and Terrell (1983:90-91) offer the very general statement that "...we do not place undue emphasis in early stages on perfection in the students' pronunciation, but rather concentrate on providing a good model with large quantities of comprehensible input before production is attempted".

Given the fact that the teaching of pronunciation in communicative teaching models has at the present time a totally undefined status, the present research was undertaken to explore some of the roles of the affective variables of linguistic stereotyping and language learner attitudes in the language acquisition process, as these factors may have an important influence on

student progress in the acquisition of a second language. One of the general findings in Purcell and Sutter (1980) was that students who expressed a greater concern toward achieving a good English pronunciation tended to be more successful in that task than students who indicated a lesser interest in that area. It seems fairly obvious that the vast majority of adults who study second languages fail to acquire what could be described as a native or even native-like pronunciation in these languages. Likewise, these same adult language learners seem initially to make remarkable progress in acquiring the sound system of these target languages, only to experience a dramatic drop-off in this pronunciation acquisition process after little more than the minimally essential elements of the second language sound system have been internalized (acquired). That is, adult learners seem to achieve a certain level of pronunciation proficiency in a second language, and they then fail to significantly improve their pronunciation. As it is hypothesized that adult learner attitudes toward second languages and language acquisition may be important factors underlying such problems in the acquisition of a native-like pronunciation, several affective variables will be explored in the present study. Data relative to the following second language acquisition attitudinal variables will be presented herein: 1. the ability of subjects to accurately evaluate their own level of pronunciation proficiency; 2. subjects' attitudes toward foreign accent; 3. the correlation of second language acquirers' degree of pronunciation proficiency with their attitudes toward foreign accent; and 4. subject reactions to three common linguistic stereotypes concerning accent in a second language.

1. **METHODOLOGY.** The data under analysis in the present study come from two sources: 1. the responses given on a questionnaire administered to 282 subjects who are all native speakers of Spanish and who have studied English as a second language for at least two years; and 2. a pronunciation evaluation questionnaire completed by the English instructors of these same 282 subjects. Eighty percent of the subjects are natives of Cuba, while the remaining 20% come from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain, Nicaragua, Chile and

Colombia. Sixty percent of the subjects are female, and the 282 subjects ranged in age from 18-63 years, their median age being 27 years. Seventy-six percent of these subjects were between 20 and 49 years of age (mean age = 29.9 years; standard deviation = 13.6). Among the subjects utilized, 64% have resided in the United States for fewer than five years, and all are permanent residents of the Little Havana section of Miami, Florida. A thirty-three item questionnaire (written in Spanish) was administered to each of the subjects, and the responses to only six of these items will be analyzed herein. The instructors who provided the pronunciation evaluations of the 282 subjects are all native speakers of American English. The subjects who were utilized represent 282 of the total enrollment of 288 students in 18 English as a second language classes which were taught by native speakers of American English over a two-year period. Six subjects were eliminated because they were not native speakers of Spanish.

2. SELF-EVALUATION OF PRONUNCIATION. On the questionnaire, each subject was asked to evaluate his/her own pronunciation of American English according to five different categories. Responses to this questionnaire item are shown in the first column of Table I.

TABLE I
Overall Evaluation of Pronunciation

	Self-Eval. %	Instructor Eval. %
Excellent	8	17
Good	25	20
Average	49	39
Poor	17	20
Very Poor	1	4

As seen in Table I, only eight percent of the subjects evaluated their English pronunciation as excellent. Twenty-five percent of the subjects said that their English pronunciation was good, forty-nine percent felt it was average, seventeen percent said it was poor, and only one percent

felt that their pronunciation could be described as very poor. When instructors evaluated the pronunciation of these same 282 subjects, (column two of Table I) they rated 17% as excellent, 20% as good, 39% as average, 20% as poor and four percent as very poor. An overall comparison of the student self-evaluation and the instructor evaluations shows that they were basically in agreement. Generally speaking, those subjects with better English pronunciation tended to under-estimate the quality of their pronunciation, while those individuals evaluated as having the greatest overall pronunciation deficiency tended to over-estimate their pronunciation achievement in English.

A one-to-one correlation of each of the 282 subject's self-evaluation of their English pronunciation with the evaluation of their instructors is shown in Table II.

TABLE II
Correlation - Self-Eval. & Instructor Eval.

Type of Corr.	Levels of Diff.	Corr. %
Sub. Overest.	3	1
Sub. Overest.	2	2
Sub. Overest.	1	21
Perfect Corr.	0	48
Sub. Underest.	1	24
Sub. Underest.	2	3
Sub. Underest.	3	1

Table II shows that in 48% of the cases, there was a perfect correlation between subject self-evaluation and instructor evaluation, and a close correlation (only one level of difference) in an additional 45% of the cases. That is, in only seven percent of the cases was the subject self-evaluation and the corresponding instructor evaluation extremely different (by two or more levels). It is clear from these data that the 282 subjects were highly accurate in evaluating their own level of pronunciation achievement in American English.

3. ACCENTED SPEECH AND SUBJECT ATTITUDES. Another item on the questionnaire used in the data-collection process asked the subjects to give their opinion of foreign accents in general. They were specifically asked to give their impression of foreign accents according to one of five categories. Six percent of the subjects indicated that foreign accents sound very nice, 24% evaluated them as nice, 32% as bad, 9% as very bad, and 29% felt they were not important. In other words, only 41% of these subjects felt that, generally speaking, foreign accents should be considered as a negative factor in second language acquisition.

A more specific item on the questionnaire tested subject reaction to a Spanish accent in their own English pronunciation. The questionnaire statement "It is very important to try to eliminate Spanish accent in your English pronunciation." drew strong agreement in 48% of the cases, agreement in 35% of the cases, disagreement from 15% of the subjects, and a strong disagreement in only 2% of the cases. With respect specifically to Spanish accent in the English of these 282 subjects, 83% of these individuals found accent to be a negative factor. This difference between the 41% of the subjects who reported that they considered foreign accents in general as negative and the 83% reporting that a Spanish accent in their English was a negative factor is striking. However, it is not immediately obvious to what exactly such a difference is to be attributed. This difference may indicate that subjects were more tolerant of another's accent, but were far more demanding of themselves. Another possible interpretation of this wide difference is that theoretical or hypothetical situations (foreign accents in general) versus specific, real personal situations elicit very different reactions on the part of adult second language acquirers. There are, of course, other possible interpretations. The unique source of the data utilized herein, to be discussed in the conclusions to this study, may also have had a strong affect on some of the results presented.

4. ATTITUDE TOWARD FOREIGN ACCENT AND PRONUNCIATION ACHIEVEMENT CORRELATION. Table III

presents a correlation of the attitudes expressed by the subjects toward Spanish accent in their own English pronunciation with the actual quality of English pronunciation they have achieved.

TABLE III
Correlation of Subjects' Attitude & Achievement

<u>Sub. Attitude:</u> "Elimination of Spanish accent is important."	<u>Sub. Pron. Achievement</u>				
	<u>Excel.</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Ave.</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Very Poor</u>
Str. Agr. 38%	58%	45%	61%	25%	
Agree 50%	26%	40%	17%	50%	
Disagree 12%	11%	13%	22%	25%	
Str. Dis. 0%	5%	2%	0%	0%	
TOTALS <u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>

One might hypothesize a high positive correlation between subjects' desire to eliminate foreign accent and the actual achievement of a high-quality pronunciation in their own English. Therefore, we might expect Table III to show that the subjects evaluated as having an excellent English pronunciation would be the most intolerant of foreign accent, and that those with the poorest English pronunciation would conversely be the most tolerant of foreign accent. The data shown in Table III, however, show inconsistent results.

Eighty-eight percent of the subjects who were evaluated as having an excellent English pronunciation expressed disapproval of a Spanish accent in their English, and 84% of the subjects whose English pronunciation was evaluated as good also expressed disapproval of Spanish accent in their English. An analysis of the data for only these two sub-groups of subjects yields an expected high positive correlation between Spanish accent disapproval and the quality of English pronunciation achieved by the subjects. Up to this point, a hypothesis predicting high pronunciation achievement and lack of foreign accent tolerance appears to be tenable. Unfortunately, the data from the other three sub-groups of subjects who had the lowest levels of English language pronunciation achievement do

not support such a hypothesis. The data in Table III indicate that all five sub-groups favor the elimination of Spanish accent in English. Specifically, 85% of the subjects with an average English pronunciation, 78% with a poor pronunciation, and 75% with very poor pronunciation also expressed disapproval of Spanish-accented English. Based on an analysis of these data, there seems to be no obvious correlation between tolerance of foreign accent and quality of second language pronunciation. There does seem to some movement toward a positive correlation in these data, in that the percentages of subjects demonstrating excellent English pronunciation to very poor pronunciation do move generally through the five sub-groups from higher to lower percentages of disapproval of foreign accent, 88%, - 84% - 85% - 78% - 75% respectively. These observed differences in percentages, however, are not statistically significant, at least not based on a data sample of this size.

5. **SPEAKER EFFORT, INTELLIGENCE AND FOREIGN ACCENT.** The questionnaire also included an item which sought subject opinion concerning the supposed relationship between language learner effort and intelligence and the ability to eliminate foreign accent. Subjects reacted as follows to the statement "Hard-working and intelligent people can always succeed in eliminating foreign accent.": 19% of the subjects indicated strong agreement; 32% agreement; 37% disagreement; 8% strong disagreement; and 4% of the subjects didn't know if the statement was true or false. That is, 51% of these subjects believed the stereotype that if you are intelligent and make an effort you can always rid yourself of a foreign accent. Forty-five percent of the subjects expressed disagreement with the supposed relationship expressed in this questionnaire statement.

6. **FOREIGN ACCENT AND JOB SUCCESS.** The 282 subjects employed in the present study were also asked how they felt about the relationship between employment success and foreign accent. The questionnaire statement read "A foreign accent decreases an individual's probability of job success." Thirteen percent of the subjects

strongly agreed with this statement, 28% agreed, 40% disagreed, 14% strongly disagreed, while 5% did not know. Therefore, most of the subjects, 54%, did not believe the stereotype that a foreign accent had a negative effect on probability of job success. It is interesting to note that although 83% of these same subjects believed that a Spanish accent in their English was a negative factor, only 41% of them believed that foreign accent in general was detrimental to job success. Although these two findings seem to contradict one another, there is an explanation for this seeming discrepancy due to the nature of the data source. As mentioned previously, this matter will be discussed in the conclusions to this study.

7. FOREIGN ACCENT AND SECOND LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION. In the final questionnaire item included in the present study, subjects were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "If an individual can express himself in a second language, the fact that he speaks with a foreign accent is of little importance." Thirty-three percent of the subjects strongly agreed with this statement, 44% agreed, 15% disagreed, 5% strongly disagreed and 3% didn't know. Once again, although 83% of these individuals believed that a Spanish accent in their English was a negative factor, only 20% of these same subjects felt that the presence of a foreign accent was detrimental if individuals could otherwise express themselves in a second language.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS. Before presenting any conclusions based on the information presented in the present study, it should be stated that the data analyzed herein must be considered tentative due both to the limited size of the corpus under analysis (282 subjects) and the interim nature of this study. In the near future more data that has now been gathered will be analyzed from a more diversified group of subjects. Furthermore, the remaining 27 items from the subjects' questionnaire will be analyzed and correlated with the data just presented. With these limitations in mind, these data would seem to support the following conclusions:

1. Most of the second language learners queried believe that if you are intelligent and

make an effort, you can always rid yourself of a foreign accent. They also felt that foreign accent was not a detriment to job success;

2. Only 20% of these same subjects felt that the presence of a foreign accent was important if a speaker could otherwise communicate in a second language;

3. Second language learners appear to be highly capable of accurately evaluating the quality of their own pronunciation in a second language;

4. Most of the subjects utilized herein (59%) did not object to foreign accents in general, but the great majority of them did object specifically to the presence of a Spanish accent in their English pronunciation; and

5. There appears to be no apparent correlation between a second language learner's disapproval of foreign accent and the actual acquisition of a high-quality pronunciation in a second language.

As previously mentioned, it is hypothesized that some of the apparent contradictions present in the data utilized in the present study may be explainable in terms of the unique sociolinguistic nature of the bilingual community in which all 282 subjects reside.

The so-called Cuban section of Miami, La Sagüesera, is generally understood by area residents to include most of the southwest quadrant of the city of Miami, a large portion of Miami's northwest quadrant nearest Flagler Street, a large portion of the city of Coral Gables, and the cities of Westchester and Sweetwater. This is an area of more than 400,000 persons of Cuban origin (United States Bureau of the Census 1982:134) and of a total of more than 750,000 Hispanics (MacDonald, 1985:45; Levitan, 1980). In this loosely defined area, it is extremely easy to acquire any goods, services or other needs in Spanish. There are Spanish-speaking hospitals, police stations, grocery stores, restaurants, dentists, florists, schools, funeral homes and every other possible business or service institution one could ever need from the cradle to the grave. Therefore, the actual need to speak English to be able to live in Little Havana is only minimal. This fact may have had a direct

influence on the opinions expressed by the 282 subjects.

Another important factor bearing on the data in this study is the ready availability of jobs to monolingual Spanish speakers in Little Havana. Once again, jobs of almost every nature are available in this area, and the need to speak English well can be of little consequence to job success. While speaking English well in Miami can provide Hispanics with more potential jobs and potentially greater opportunities for upward social and employment mobility, speaking English well it is not a requirement for either survival or job success.

Also, many Americans in the Miami/South Florida are either bilingual in English and Spanish, functional (in varying degrees) in Spanish, or at least skillful in understanding Spanish accented English. Unlike the case in most immigrant situations in which the immigrant has had to learn to cope linguistically and culturally with a new environment, in Miami, due largely to the economic opportunities presented by the large Hispanic community, many Americans have had to learn at least some Spanish to survive. This situation may have strongly influenced the subjects' feelings concerning the relative importance of accent if communication is achieved.

To test the validity of the above hypothesis concerning the uniqueness of the Miami/South Florida linguistic community, several follow-up studies to the present one could be made. For example, the questionnaire used herein could be given to Hispanics in the United States who live in areas other than Miami. A comparison of these two bodies of data would prove interesting. Also, the same questionnaire given to Hispanics who live in other United States communities which have large Hispanic centers, such as Los Angeles, New York City, and San Antonio, would provide further data. One further interesting possibility would be to administer an English version of the questionnaire used in the present study to English speakers who have daily contact with Hispanics in areas such as Miami. Hopefully, the present study has provided some useful data concerning attitudes and stereotypes about second language learning. It is clear, however, that this is an area in the

field of second language acquisition that needs to be investigated in much greater detail before any reliable conclusions can be drawn concerning the affective variables discussed in this study.

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