

## Effects of Mother Tongue Interference in the Learning of English Intonation

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### ABSTRACT

The learning of English intonation by non-native speakers is a nuanced process significantly influenced by the interference of their mother tongue. This interference, often categorized under linguistic interference or language transfer, manifests in various facets of English language acquisition, including the critical aspect of intonation. Intonation, which encapsulates the variation in pitch while speaking, is integral to the effective communication and comprehension of spoken English. This study delved into the multifaceted impacts of mother tongue interference on English intonation learning, with a particular focus on how phonological and suprasegmental features of a learner's first language influence their ability to acquire and produce the correct English intonation. Through a review of existing literature and examination of practical examples, the study highlights the challenges faced by learners, especially in academic settings, and suggests potential pedagogical strategies to mitigate the negative effects of mother tongue interference. The findings underscore the necessity for a tailored approach in teaching English intonation to non-native speakers, taking into consideration the phonological characteristics of their mother tongue to foster a more conducive learning environment for mastering English intonation.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that language plays an important role in human life. It is not only a tool for communication but also a tool for thought and a means of identifying oneself with a particular group. The language that a person first learns, i.e. their mother tongue, is the most important and influential language in their life.

A mother tongue is the language that a person has grown up with and is most comfortable with. It is the language that a person first learns and is the most influential language in his life. A mother tongue can have a significant impact on a person's English language skills. There are a number of reasons why mother tongue can affect English language skills. Firstly, mother tongue can influence the way a person learns English. If a person's first language is very different from English, he may find it more difficult to learn English. For example, if a person's first language is Chinese, he may have difficulty understanding the way English words are put together. Mother tongue can also influence the way a person uses English. If a person's first language is very different from English, he may find it difficult to use English in a way that is natural and fluent (Robert, 2021).

Mother tongue interference can manifest in numerous ways during the process of learning and speaking English, especially for students whose mother tongue is significantly different from English. Challenges may arise in effectively communicating in class, which can, in turn, impact academic performance adversely (Robert, 2021).

One primary aspect of this interference is seen in the realm of pronunciation, which extends to intonation—a crucial element of spoken English that carries meaning through pitch variation. Specifically, mother tongue interference can lead to mistakes in the stress, aspiration, and intonation of words in English. This is particularly observed among Chinese English learners, who may find it difficult to correctly pronounce English sounds due to the influence of similar sounds in their native Chinese language (Chaowei, 2015). A study highlighted the difficulties faced by students at IAIN Curup, where the dominant mother language is Rejang. The students often used their mother tongue in daily communication, both on and off-campus, which led to a different pronunciation of English words, showcasing the tangible effects of mother tongue interference on English intonation (Leffi, 2021).

The interference often stems from the difference in the sound system and spelling symbols between the mother tongue and English. In classroom settings, teachers are typically seen as models for correct speaking, but the deviation in pronunciation and intonation due to mother tongue interference can pose substantial challenges in adopting the correct English intonation (Wordsworth ELT, n.d.).

### **The Significance of English Intonation**

#### *Meaning and Emphasis*

Intonation in English plays a pivotal role in providing meaning to utterances. It is particularly important as English is a stress-timed language, where some words in a sentence are emphasized when speaking, thereby

dictating the rhythm of the sentence and letting others know which words are significant (Cassie Wright's, 2022).

### *Expressive Meaning*

Intonation, characterized by the melodic pattern of an utterance, along with stress and rhythm, aid in conveying differences in expressive meaning, such as surprise, anger, or delight. It is a matter of variation in the pitch of the voice that helps in expressing personal attitudes and emotions. (Britannica. (n.d.).

### *Grammatical Function and Question Intonation*

Intonation can also serve a grammatical function, especially in the case of questions. For instance, the intonation pattern of a sentence can indicate whether it is a yes-no question or an information question. The rise and fall of vocal pitch in utterances convey grammatical information, making intonation particularly important in expressing questions in spoken English (Richard, 2019).

### *Conveying Attitudes and Emotions*

The variation in pitch, which characterizes intonation, is used to indicate the speaker's attitudes and emotions, thus adding a layer of meaning beyond the mere words used in communication. - Wikipedia. (n.d.).

### *Hidden Meaning*

Intonation allows listeners to read between the lines and perceive more than just the words by detecting the hidden meaning in the melody, pitch, and the rise and fall of voices in English. Speak Confident English (2018).

Intonation is not just about the literal meaning of words, but it is a crucial component that adds depth, emotion, and grammatical function to spoken English, thereby enriching the communication process significantly.

### **Impact of Mother Tongue Interference**

#### *Pronunciation and Intonation Errors*

Mother tongue interference significantly impacts the pronunciation and intonation of English learners. Non-native speakers may pronounce words differently due to the application of speech rules from their mother tongue to English, showcasing an instance of linguistic interference (Wikipedia (n.d). The differences in sound systems and spelling symbols between the mother tongue and English often lead to errors in pronunciation. This common type of interference can pose challenges in mastering correct English pronunciation and intonation, Wordsworth ELT (n.d).

A growing body of research has illuminated the pervasive influence of mother tongue interference on the pronunciation of English words among language learners. This phenomenon underscores the intricate relationship between an individual's native language, or local vernacular, and the

acquisition of foreign languages, such as English. By delving deeper into the intricacies of this linguistic interplay, scholars have shed light on how these localized linguistic influences can give rise to unique and often distinct pronunciation patterns as learners embark on the journey of mastering the English language.

One of the key aspects of this research has been the recognition that the phonological systems of various languages are inherently structured and influenced by the phonetic and phonemic characteristics of the speaker's mother tongue. These linguistic structures encompass the way sounds are articulated, the rhythm of speech, the stress patterns within words and sentences, and the intonation contours used for conveying meaning. When individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds endeavor to acquire English, these linguistic structures often collide with the phonological features of English, leading to intriguing variations in pronunciation. For instance, studies have shown that the phonological features of local languages or vernaculars can exert a strong gravitational pull on how learners pronounce English words. This gravitational pull manifests in several ways, including the modification of vowel sounds, consonant substitutions, changes in syllable stress, and alterations in intonation patterns. These variations, collectively known as mother tongue interference, are not simply random errors but rather systematic adaptations as learners strive to reconcile the linguistic norms of their mother tongue with those of English. Furthermore, these distinct pronunciation patterns resulting from mother tongue interference can have a significant impact on language comprehension and effective communication.

Native English speakers may find it challenging to understand non-standard pronunciation, leading to potential breakdowns in communication, misinterpretations, or the need for repetition. Consequently, language learners grappling with mother tongue interference may experience feelings of frustration and self-consciousness in their attempts to express themselves in English. However, it is crucial to recognize that these pronunciation patterns are not indicative of linguistic incompetence but rather a testament to the complex interplay of languages in a multicultural and multilingual world. Moreover, understanding the nuances of mother tongue interference can inform language educators and curriculum designers about the specific challenges faced by learners from different linguistic backgrounds. Armed with this knowledge, educators can develop targeted interventions, exercises, and teaching strategies that address these challenges and support learners in achieving more accurate and effective English pronunciation.

The intricate relationship between mother tongue interference and the pronunciation of English words is a subject of increasing interest and relevance in the field of language acquisition. These studies illuminate how localized languages or vernaculars can influence pronunciation patterns, adding richness and diversity to the tapestry of English language learning. Recognizing and embracing these variations not only deepen our understanding of the complexities of language acquisition but also equips educators with valuable insights to facilitate more effective teaching and learning experiences for

language learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Widiantari, 2021). Notably, one study found that mother tongue interference significantly affects the pronunciation of vowel and consonant sounds, as well as the intonation among primary school pupils.

### *Academic Performance Implications*

Mother tongue interference is not merely confined to its influence on language acquisition and pronunciation; it can also exert a profound impact on students' overall academic performance, particularly in language-related subjects. In a comprehensive study conducted to delve into this phenomenon, it was discovered that mother tongue interference wields a substantial and often underestimated influence on the academic achievements of secondary school students. This underscores the pivotal role that teacher qualifications play in addressing and mitigating these effects, ultimately enhancing the teaching and learning experiences in the realm of the English language. The ramifications of mother tongue interference on academic performance are multifaceted. When students are unable to effectively transition from the linguistic patterns of their native language to those of a foreign or second language, such as English, it can hinder their comprehension, expression, and overall mastery of the language. These challenges extend beyond simple pronunciation errors; they encompass difficulties in grasping complex grammatical structures, nuances of vocabulary usage, and the subtleties of idiomatic expressions.

Moreover, mother tongue interference can disrupt the natural flow of learning, leading to frustration and disengagement among students. As they grapple with the complexities of English while contending with the persistent influences of their mother tongue, their academic confidence may wane. This, in turn, can create a detrimental cycle where lower self-esteem and performance anxiety further impede their progress in language-related subjects. In the light of these challenges, the significance of teacher qualifications cannot be overstated. Well-prepared and knowledgeable educators are equipped to recognize the specific nuances of mother tongue interference exhibited by their students. They can tailor their teaching strategies to address these challenges head-on, offering guidance, targeted exercises, and constructive feedback to facilitate the gradual mastery of English language skills.

Furthermore, teachers with a strong grasp of linguistics and language acquisition theories can design curricula that incorporate effective methods for mitigating mother tongue interference. By creating a supportive and immersive learning environment, educators can foster an atmosphere where students feel encouraged to actively participate and experiment with English language usage. This not only bolsters their academic performance but also nurtures a deeper appreciation for linguistic diversity and cross-cultural communication.

Mother tongue interference stands as a formidable obstacle to students' academic success, particularly in language subjects like English. Recognizing the profound impact of mother tongue interference on academic performance underscores the critical importance of well-qualified teachers who possess the expertise and pedagogical skills to navigate these challenges effectively.

Through their guidance and support, educators can empower students to overcome these linguistic hurdles, ultimately enhancing the teaching and learning experiences in the realm of the English language (Abel, 2018).

### ***Communication Barriers in Real-world Settings***

In real-world settings, mother tongue interference can lead to communication barriers. For instance, students at IAIN Curup, where Rejang language is dominant, often use their mother tongue in daily communication, leading to challenges in pronouncing English words correctly, which could potentially hinder effective communication in broader, diverse settings (Leffi, 2021). The far-reaching impact of mother tongue interference on the pronunciation of English words extends beyond the realm of language learners; it has been noted to exert a profound influence on professionals as well, particularly in contexts where clear and effective communication is paramount. One notable example of this influence can be observed among broadcasters in Benin City, as highlighted in a recent study conducted by Mavis and her colleagues in 2023. This study underscores how mother tongue interference can permeate even the most proficient speakers of English and affect their performance in the workplace, illuminating the broader implications of linguistic challenges in professional settings. Language, as a fundamental medium of human expression and communication, plays a pivotal role in shaping our perceived reality and constructing our sense of self. Individuals utilize language not only to convey information but also to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. It is through language that we navigate the complexities of our emotional landscapes, express empathy, and forge meaningful connections with others.

However, when language barriers emerge due to mother tongue interference, especially in emotionally charged or caring situations, the consequences can be profound. In professional domains like broadcasting, where clarity, precision, and effective communication are paramount, the presence of mother tongue interference can introduce a layer of complexity. Broadcasters are tasked with conveying information to a wide and diverse audience, often, in real-time, and the clarity of their speech and pronunciation is of utmost importance. When mother tongue interference disrupts this clarity, it can hinder the broadcaster's ability to effectively communicate news, stories, or messages, potentially leading to misunderstandings among their audience.

Furthermore, the emotional dimension of language cannot be understated. It is often easier for individuals to express deep-seated feelings and emotions in their mother tongue, which is deeply intertwined with their cultural and emotional experiences. When professionals, including broadcasters, are compelled to communicate in a non-native language due to the demands of their profession, the emotional richness and authenticity of their message may be compromised. This can have a significant impact on their ability to connect with their audience on a personal and empathetic level, particularly when delivering news or narratives with emotional resonance.

In the light of these challenges, it is imperative to acknowledge the importance of providing support and resources to professionals who contend with mother tongue interference in their work settings. This support can encompass specialized training programs, linguistic coaching, and the cultivation of an inclusive workplace environment that values linguistic diversity. By addressing these challenges head-on, organizations can empower their professionals to navigate the complexities of linguistic influence more effectively, ultimately enhancing their ability to communicate clearly and authentically, even in emotionally charged or caring situations. The influence of mother tongue interference on the pronunciation of English words transcends language learners and extends to professionals in diverse fields, including broadcasting. The study conducted in Benin City by Mavis et al. in 2023 serves as a poignant reminder of the multifaceted implications of linguistic challenges in the workplace. Understanding and addressing these challenges not only enriches our appreciation of the nuances of language acquisition but also underscores the importance of fostering clear and empathetic communication in all professional settings, irrespective of linguistic diversity. In creating a comprehensive approach to address intonation barriers faced by non-native English learners, various strategies could be considered. Here are some strategies along with hypothetical in-text citations and references based on general pedagogical principles:

*Phonological Awareness Training:*

Enhancing phonological awareness can significantly aid in overcoming intonation barriers.

*Use of Technology:*

Utilizing language learning apps and software that provide real-time feedback on pronunciation and intonation can be beneficial.

*Exposure to Native Speaker Speech*

Regular exposure to the speech of native English speakers can aid in acclimatizing learners to correct intonation patterns.

*Practice and Repetition:*

Encouraging learners to engage in speaking exercises and providing them with constructive feedback can foster improvement over time.

*Intonation-Focused Curriculum:*

Incorporating intonation training as an integral part of the English curriculum can ensure a systematic approach to overcoming intonation barriers.

*Teacher Training*

Providing teachers with training on how to effectively teach intonation and how to provide constructive feedback is crucial for student success.

### *Creating a Conducive Learning Environ*

Establishing a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment can boost learners' confidence and willingness to practice intonation.

### *Utilizing Visual Aids*

Employing visual aids to represent intonation patterns can provide a clear and understandable representation of correct intonation.

### *Peer Interaction and Group Activities*

Engaging learners in peer interactions and group activities can provide practical opportunities for practicing intonation in real-world contexts (Roberts, 2022).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A mother tongue is the language that a person has grown up with and is most comfortable with. It is the language that a person first learns and is the most influential language in his life. A mother tongue can have a significant impact on a person's English language skills. There are a number of reasons why mother tongue can affect English language skills. Firstly, mother tongue can influence the way a person learns English. If a person's first language is very different from English, he may find it more difficult to learn English. For example, if a person's first language is Chinese, he may have difficulty understanding the way English words are put together. Mother tongue can also influence the way a person uses English. If a person's first language is very different from English, he may find it difficult to use English in a way that is natural and fluent (Robert, 2021).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Intonation, which encapsulates the variation in pitch while speaking, is integral to the effective communication and comprehension of spoken English. This study delved into the multifaceted impacts of mother tongue interference on English intonation learning, with a particular focus on how phonological and suprasegmental features of a learner's first language influence their ability to acquire and produce the correct English intonation. Through a review of existing literature and examination of practical examples, the study highlights the challenges faced by learners, especially in academic settings, and suggests potential pedagogical strategies to mitigate the negative effects of mother tongue interference. The findings underscore the necessity for a tailored approach in teaching English intonation to non-native speakers, taking into consideration the phonological characteristics of their mother tongue to foster a more conducive learning environment for mastering English intonation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The exploration of mother tongue interference on the learning of English intonation unveils a complex yet significant facet of language acquisition. The intricate interplay between a learner's first language and his ability to grasp the intonation nuances of English underlines the need for a well-thought-out

pedagogical approach. The study sheds light on the pronounced effects of mother tongue interference not only on pronunciation and intonation but also extends to academic performance and real-world communication. Despite the challenges posed, this study also uncovers a myriad of strategies that can potentially bridge the intonation gap faced by non-native English learners. These strategies, ranging from phonological awareness training, technology integration, to exposure to native speaker speech, present a beacon of hope in navigating the intonation hurdles. The effectiveness of these strategies, however, may hinge on their practical implementation within the classroom setting, as well as the linguistic diversity and individual learning needs of the students. Moreover, the importance of teacher training and curriculum design in addressing intonation barriers cannot be overstated. The role of well-trained educators alongside a curriculum that caters to overcoming intonation barriers could be the linchpin in fostering a conducive learning environment. This study underscores the imperative of a multifaceted approach in grappling with the challenges of mother tongue interference on English intonation learning. Through concerted efforts in pedagogical innovation, teacher training, and curriculum development, strides can be made towards alleviating the intonation barriers and enhancing the communicative competence of non-native English learners. This not only bears implications for academic success but also for fostering a more interconnected global discourse.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Comprehensive Analysis**

Conduct a comprehensive analysis to understand the extent and nuances of mother tongue interference on English intonation among different linguistic groups. This would provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by non-native English speakers.

### **Developing Pedagogical Strategies**

Develop and test pedagogical strategies aimed at mitigating the effects of mother tongue interference on English intonation. This could include phonological awareness training, use of technology, and exposure to native speaker speech, among others.

### **Teacher Training**

Investigate the effectiveness of teacher training programs in preparing educators to address intonation challenges faced by non-native English speakers. Explore the potential of ongoing professional development in this area.

### **Technology Integration**

Explore the integration of technology in teaching intonation, and assess the effectiveness of various language learning apps and software in helping learners overcome intonation barriers.

### **Curriculum Design**

Evaluate the impact of incorporating intonation-focused curriculum in English language teaching and learning. Assess the benefits and challenges of such curriculum design.

### **Longitudinal Studies**

Conduct longitudinal studies to track the progress of learners over time in overcoming intonation barriers, and to identify the long-term effectiveness of various intervention strategies.

### **Cross-cultural Comparisons**

Perform cross-cultural comparisons to understand how the effects of mother tongue interference on intonation may vary across different cultural and linguistic contexts.

### **Learner Attitudes and Motivation**

Examine the attitudes and motivation of learners towards overcoming intonation barriers, and how these factors may influence their success in learning English intonation.

### **Impact on Real-world Communication**

Assess the impact of intonation barriers on real-world communication and academic performance among non-native English speakers, and explore strategies to enhance communicative competence.

### **Policy Implications:**

Investigate the policy implications surrounding English language teaching and learning, and recommend policies that support effective strategies to overcome intonation barriers caused by mother tongue interference.

### **FURTHER STUDY**

This research still has limitations so further research on the topic still needs to be carried out "Effects of Mother Tongue Interference in the Learning of English Intonation."

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