CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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The main task of this study was to find out the actual problems of introducing the Russian segmental features to the Bengali speaking learners on the basis of an examination of the two systems of sound segments in contact. Necessary steps were taken and procedures followed to arrive at logical conclusions, drawn later in this chapter.

This chapter also suggests possible further studies. However, at the very beginning it includes a summary of the salient features of this thesis.

VII.1 TITLE OF THE THESIS

"PROBLEMS OF TEACHING RUSSIAN SEGMENTAL FEATURES TO BENGALI SPEAKING STUDENTS".

VII.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The study mainly focuses on 2nd language acquisition and the interference of the L1 in the process. While discussing the background of the study and its relevance in the present context, the introductory chapter attempts at rationalising the need for such a study, based on a contrastive examination of the languages in contact, mainly that of TL and L1. This contact results in some ERRORS, which are reflected in speech, its recordings and writing.

VII.3 RUSSIAN AND BENGALI : SYSTEMS OF SOUND SEGMENTS

Here an attempt has been made to examine the two systems of sound segments (Russian and Bengali) by describing them. The Russian vowel phonemes have been paid special attention to in

view of STRESS AND REDÚCTION. While describing the Russian consonantal phonemes attention has been paid to:

a.Hard and soft consonants.

b.Voiced and voiceless consonants and their changes.

c.Assimilation.

d.Alternation.

e.Other changes of sound values.

The Bengali vowel phonemes are characterised by the phenomenon of length, and this has been discussed in detail. The consonantal phonemes of the Bengali language have also been described.

VII.4   METHODS OF TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Here an analysis of the various concepts and methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language, and the role of the MT has been made.

a. That foreign language learning basically is a mechanical process of habit formation. In this process the MT constantly interferes with its own habits. This can be avoided by strengthening the TL habits by reinforcement and repetitions, and since language is behavio/ral, the learner should be trained to behave.

b. That language abilities and skills would be better shaped by more effectively introducing the spoken element (speech activity) before the written forms by means of drills, repetitions, etc.

c. That in the process of TL training an analogical outlook would prove to be better in providing a strong foundation rather than analysis because otherwise the students will try to draw corrollaries in the MT.

Here an attempt has been made to establish the theoretical aspects of psychological, sociological and linguistic factors that go to explaining the difficult nature of training in a foreign language, and the guidelines for the classification of errors for the present study have been framed. They have been identified under the following three categories:

1.Phonetic

2.Phonologically differential

3.Mixed

Apart from the above, this chapter also summarises the various existing methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language, their main advantages and disadvantages.

VII.5 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A review of available related literature (books, articles and dissertations) along with the implications of the same for the present study have been included here.

It is noted that there has practically been no substantive work that throws light directly on the present study. However, the articles reviewed have helped the researcher in various ways, including making the format for the classification and analysis of errors for this study.

VII.6 PLAN AND PROCEDURE

Here the methodology adopted for the present research has been described. It includes the following:

1.Title of the study and its operational framework.

2.Objectives of the study.

3.Hypothesis of the study.

4.Sample and its description.

5.Tools, techniques and description of data sheets.

6.Classification model.

7.Validation of data sheets.

8.Collection of data.

9.Time devoted.

10.Limitations of the study.

11.Coding.

The above have been discussed in detail.

VII.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data for this study have been analysed mainly based on a contrastive study of the two languages in contact in the light of the interfering effects of the L1.This chapter illustrates with tables the peculiarities of the two systems of sound segments, the possible nature of interference of the L1, and later approbation of 'phonetic data' in light of perceptual, environmental and other data, gathered from three categories of students:

Category - I   Bengali students learning the Russian language in the Indian environment.

Category - II   Bengali students learning the Russian language in the Russian environment.

Category - III Students, other than those with Bengali as their L1, learning the Russian language.

Data received from the above categories have been analysed and classified under:

a. ERTP :Errors rectifiable with time and practice.

b. MPLII:Most problematic due to L1 influence.

c. MPOTI:Most problematic due to OT influence.

d. MTIE:Mother tongue influenced error.

e. OTIE:Other tongue influenced error.
f. TE:Typical error.

g. CAE:Errors due to carelessness and automatisation thereof.

These errors have been illustrated in a tabular form along with examples from both L1 and TL, and later on a detailed note on each error has been given with a view to drawing logical conclusions.

This chapter also includes comments gathered from teachers and students of the Russian language on the nature of the problem under study.

VII.8 MAJOR FINDINGS

Data compiled on the basis of the phonetic test model, interview data, dictation data, and observations on the basis of perceptual and environmental data lead to the following findings:

1. That a sizeable number of problems of teaching Russian language to the Bengali speaking learners is directly linked with the interference of the L1. Under this group the errors reflected in the following Sr.Nos. 03,04,07,21,22,23,26,33,44 in Table : 19 are identified to be committed at random by a majority of the Bengali speaking students, and it is quite difficult for them to overcome these errors due to L1 inertia or influence. Sr. No. 32 is an error typical of all BL1 students of 'GhO:ti'dialect background only.

The errors against Sr. Nos. 05,08,13,28,29,30,41,42,43 are common for OL1 students. Some of them being quite problematic for all.

2. That interference or the so called 'Foreign Accent', which is reflected while speaking in a foreign tongue, is a phenomenon resulting from the process of two languages (MT and TL) coming in contact with each other, and differences in their articulatory systems.

3. That interference is prevalent not only with isolated users of the TL, but also as a rule with most of the speakers having the same L1 background (T.No.18, Sr. No. 32.).

4a. That these errors, depending upon their nature and characteristics, can be classified under:

    i.   PHONETIC.
    ii.   PHONOLOGICALLY DIFFERENTIAL.
    iii. MIXED.

4b. That these errors are reflected not only in speech, but in writing too (Table 20) .

4c. That some of the above errors can be rectified with time and proper practice, whereas some others, typically influenced by the L1, are deep rooted and require greater effort to overcome.

5. That in order to ensure that the TL does not become a variation of the MT, the instructor should make sure that the learner does not draw wrong parallels between the TL and the MT.

6. That foreign language learning is basically a process of habit formation, in which the L1 constantly interferes with its own habits. This must be avoided by strengthening and reinforcing the TL habits.

7. That speech habits of the TL should be introduced more effectively at the initial stages by means of drills, repetitions etc., than writing practice. However, sooner or later they will have to work in tandem.

8. That in the process of training in the TL, the OTs of the learners also will have to be paid adequate attention to, and made best use of. Especially for the Bengali students quite a few difficulties could be eased out by the help of the OTs (Table : 19, Sr. No. 34.).

9. That training in hearing and memory are as much important as is training in pronunciation, and both must follow simultaneously.

10. That it was observed that female students generally had a better command over pronunciation as compared to males.

11. That after the initial training in segments and segmental combinations, a supportive course in 'phonetics' must accompany

the later lessons with a view to reinforcing the TL articulations, and also introducing the more complicated units of the TL segments.

VII.9 CONCLUSION

The statement of conclusion would remain incomplete to the extent it is not adequately supported by probable solutions to the problems of training in the TL segments. Therefore, wherever possible, some way of resolving these problems have been indicated.

The optimal path of training in a foreign language must begin with a conscious act of the acquisition of the TL segments, first of all by averting the inertia of the MT, and then by recognising correctly the nature of the phonetic model and the complexities of its material presentation for the purpose of studies. The question of the interference of the MT (L1) should not be viewed in isolation from the OTs of the learner,because some errors may actually occur due to the influence of the OTs. At the same time another set of errors could well be averted with their help.

At times it becomes quite difficult to make out the nature of interference, especially when they become quite automatic even for the teachers, and more so when the L1 of the teachers and the students is the same. Hence interferences can be classified either by their origin or results. While classifying the errors on the basis of the results, one must also remember if the same is affecting the perception or the production of the sound, which may either add an accent to the segment, or even change the meaning of the same.

Interference by their origin can be classified under the following groups:

1. Interference due to a large difference in the systems of phonological distinctions of the languages in contact (Bengali and Russian).

2. Interference due to dissimilarities in the combinational patterns of corresponding phonemes in the native and target languages (Bengali and Russian).

3. Interference due to differences in the neutralisation rules of the two languages.

4. Interference due to misconceptions of the phonetic realisations of the allophones of the counter-phonemes, and differences in the positional variants.

5. Interference due to differences in the representations of the phonemes of both L1 and OTs in their written forms.

In the process of learning the TL, especially at the formative stages, the students always try to draw parallels between the MT and the TL. Hence, training in the TL, in fact, becomes a training in the segmental equivalents in terms of meanings, thereby rendering the TL into a variation of the L1. This has to be very consciously avoided, and the teacher has to clearly remember as to what extent the MT could help in the process of the TL acquisition.

A possible solution to the above problem could be that of presenting the material only as it should be, or ought to be, and certainly not by drawing parallels. If at all a comparative approach is needed, and only when it is unavoidable, the TL units may be illustrated in terms of how they are different from those in the MT, by constantly repeating the TL units in a variety of combinations, and repeating them at various occasions. There, ofcourse, is no need of a total banishment of the MT from the class room (Wilkins, D.A. 1981). It is important to make a positive use of the MT.

Language abilities and skills are better shaped by effectively introducing the 'speech activity' before the written forms by means of drills, repetitions etc. It is also important to remember that TL segments have to be, ideally, introduced in meaningful combinations (words) with other segments especially in strong positions, rather than in isolation.

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MULTILINGUAL INDIAN CLASSROOMS, where students also belong to various professional backgrounds and different age and interest groups, where each Bengali speaking student is expected to be (and they are) exposed to atleast another two languages, viz. English and Hindi, the negative role of the L1 could be considerably reduced with the help of the OTs. The teacher concerned will have to work out the set of problematic segmental units common for all students, and those specific ones which affect only the Bengali speaking students. It is noted that the other perceptual and environmental factors comparatively play a rather negligible role (except for age and medium of instruction) in the said process of TL training, especially in the formative stages.

The above conclusions lead to the confirmation of the hypothesis, that:

IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE A DIRECT ACCESS TO THE PROCESS OF THE FORMATION OF FOREIGN ARTICULATION, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE INTERFERENCE OF THE MT, THROUGH A SPECIAL AND ORIENTED APPROACH, SINCE DIFFICULTIES IN THE PROCESS OF TRAINING IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE (SEGMENTALS) BY BENGALI SPEAKING LEARNERS WILL MAINLY DEPEND ON THE DIFFERENCES IN THE ARTICULATORY SYSTEMS OF THE TWO LANGUAGES IN CONTACT.

TO CONCLUDE, it is important to emphasise that the L1 (Bengali) plays a decisive role in the acquisition of the TL (Russian). This interference is noticed right at the stage of the introduction of the segmental features of the TL. However, correct and timely identification of these problems could make better 'Russists' out of the Bengali students of the Russian language. Hence, with a view to identifying the type and the character of the phonetic / phonological error, and knowing the reasons for such errors, the teacher must be acquainted, even passively, with the salient features of the phonetic system of the Bengali language.

VII.10 SUGGESTED FURTHER STUDY

Any work on a topic like the present one can be more meaningful with the inclusion of the SUPRASEGMENTAL FEATURES of the Russian language, which play an important role and pose a variety of problems for the foreign students.

Though stress and reduction of vowels in the Russian system have been suitably included, however, 'Intonational Patterns' of the Russian language which have their own peculiarities and problems, have not been touched upon in this thesis.

It is, therefore, expected that further research in this area could be undertaken.