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Language Learner Profile

1. Introduction

Alejandro Gutiérrez is a 24 year-old student at CSUMB, majoring in Spanish with an emphasis in Linguistics. He was born in the northern part of Guadalajara, Jalisco and came to the United States at the age of 11. Like in many other cultures, Alejandro’s name was passed down from a family member in this case from his grandfather. Being raised and born in Mexico, his first language is Spanish. His family migrated to the United States for a better life and better living conditions. Alejandro started learning English at age 11 and has been learning English for 13 years. His parents don’t speak English which is why he mostly speaks Spanish at home with his parents and siblings. Alejandro’s parents only got up to 6th grade education in Mexico; therefore, they had no knowledge of the English language when they first came to the United States. The parents were unable to help Alejandro and his siblings in their English learning experience, but luckily there were teachers who were kind enough to help out as much as they could.

Alejandro finds it important to learn various languages to have more open opportunities for employment. Alejandro took four years of French in high school, four semesters of Italian at CSUMB, and one year of German at Monterey Peninsula College. While Alejandro was learning his second language, English, he had the support of his teachers and fellow classmates who also spoke Spanish as their first language. He said “I would ask the teachers for clarificacion and even stay after class if I had questions”. Alejandro said the best way to learn a new language was to ask questions and make sure he understood everything before moving on to something more difficult.

II. Background

In this case the language consultants first language is Spanish. Spanish and English are very different language but the major difference is that in Spanish we say the word exactly as we see it written and there is only one way of saying vowels. In English there are rules to how words are said and there is more than one way to pronounce a vowel, for example; the *i* in bit and ice, they are said completely different. This leads to a lot of confusion in Spanish speaking English learners, for example, the word bit, a Spanish speaker may be inclined to say *beet* with the Spanish *i* instead of *bit* with the English lax vowel*.*

Another thing that is very distinguished between English and Spanish are the consonants and consonant blends. Spanish doesn’t allow s- blends at beginning of words (Helman, 2004, p.454) so Spanish speakers add *e*  to make a word like *smile* to *esmile.* English consonant sounds that also exist in Spanish are *p, b, t, d, k, g, m, n, f, s, w, y, ch,* and *l.* Consonants that are difficult for Spanish speakers to produce are *v, z, th, sh* and *zh.* In Spanish there is no distinction between *v* and *b* or *s* and *z,* therefore;Spanish speakers say *berry* for *very,* and *sue* for *zoo* (Helman, 2004, p.454).

III. Body

Phonology refers to the sounds in language and for phonology I decided to look at the two variations of the *th* which are the voiced and voiceless interdental fricatives. One is the [θ]voiceless fricative (thin) and the other is [ð] voiced fricative (this). Since my language learner spoke Spanish first, I thought he might have had trouble differentiating the two.

Morphology is the study of forms of words and refers to linguistic units such as; root words, suffixes, suffixes, and parts of speech. I chose to look at the simple past -ed words and look for words he might have said wrong for example, an irregular word like the past tense of *run* would be *ran* instead of *runned.*

For syntax I decided to look for the singular personal pronoun *I* since my language learner used a lot of it and there was the chance that he might have used it wrong. For example; he might have used *me* instead of *I.*

In the three areas; phonology, morphology, and syntax, my language learner got 100% accuracy. This lead me to the conclusion that he speaks English very well since he has been to school in the United States for almost 12 years now. In addition to the years he’s been in school, he practices and speaks English outside of school, for the most part in his home and his community.

IV. Conclusion

My language learners English is a whole lot better than i expected, he is very fluent in English. He started learning English at the age of 11 and he has been taking classes in English for about 13 years now so that explains why his English is so good. My language learner has been surrounded by English the majority of his life and even though he speaks Spanish at home, he has been studying and trying to improve his English ever since he came to the United States.

The language consultant had no errors in the three areas of phonology, morphology and syntax, which I thought was very surprising since I at least expected a few errors. I assumed that he would make a mistake because he didn’t learn English at an early age and because for the main part he attended elementary school in Mexico, so he didn’t have the early English language skills we get when attending elementary school in English.

My language learner still considered himself in the process of learning English “language learning is a continuous developmental process that occurs throughout a lifetime” (Garcia, 2009, p.59) he knows that there is much to learn besides reading and writing, there is always space for new knowledge. Even though there is the misconception that “native languages are a crutch that impedes students’ progress in English” (Walqui, 2000, p.28) it proved very wrong in this case, my language learner kept speaking and practicing his native language and that did not affect his English learning.

V. Reflection

From this project I learned how to analyze, classify and identify a language learner based on their English skills and how they learned the language. The first part of this project was to analyse and classify the kind of learner my language learner was. The second part was to listen to the recording of the interview and analyze the way the language learner spoke. In analyzing the phonology we used what we learned the first part of this semester which was to distinguish sounds, in this case, the voiced and voiceless interdental fricatives ([θ]voiceless fricative/[ð] voiced fricative).

Because of this project I would like to learn more about the differences and similarities between Spanish and English. This class just makes me want to learn a whole lot more about language acquisition, it is a bit complicated but very interesting to me.

Citations

Garcia, O. (2009) Bilingualism and Translanguaging

Helman, L.A. (2004) Building on the sound system of Spanish

Walqui, A. (2000) Second Language Acquisition and the Schooling of Immigrant Students