



INTERLANGUAGE IN THE PRONUNCIATION AND INTONATION OF ADOLESCENT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

LA INTERLENGUA EN LA PRONUNCIACIÓN Y ENTONACIÓN DE ESTUDIANTES ADOLESCENTES DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

Pablo Daniel Palacios Palacios¹

E-mail: pablo.palacios@upec.edu.ec

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9662-9693>

María Teresa Rodríguez¹

E-mail: mariat.rodriguez@upec.edu.ec

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6572-4143>

¹ Universidad Politécnica Estatal del Carchi. Ecuador.

*Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

The article, entitled "Interlanguage in the Pronunciation and Intonation of Adolescent Students of English as a Foreign Language," addresses the issue of the influence of the native language on the acquisition of English pronunciation and intonation by upper elementary school students in Ecuador. The research focuses on identifying the interlanguage patterns present in students' oral production and analyzing the factors that influence their development. The study was conducted at the "Ángel de la Guarda" Elementary School in Tulcan, using a qualitative and explanatory approach. Samples of students' oral production were collected in different contexts, and questionnaires and interviews were conducted with students and teachers to identify influencing factors. Among the factors that influence the development of interlanguage are the age at which target language acquisition begins, the level of linguistic proficiency in the native language, exposure to the target language, and attitudes and motivations toward learning English. Based on these findings, teaching and learning strategies were designed that include explicit instruction in pronunciation and intonation, the use of educational technologies, the promotion of independent learning, and ongoing oral interaction. The research concludes that the implementation of these strategies can significantly improve students' communicative competence, contributing to teacher training and the improvement of teaching materials and educational policies in the Ecuadorian context.

Keywords:

Interlanguage, pronunciation, intonation, English teaching, Higher Basic Education.

RESUMEN

Se aborda la problemática de la influencia de la lengua materna en la adquisición de la pronunciación y entonación del inglés por parte de estudiantes de Educación Básica Superior en Ecuador. La investigación se centra en identificar los patrones de interlengua presentes en la producción oral de los estudiantes y en analizar los factores que influyen en su desarrollo. El estudio se llevó a cabo en la Escuela de Educación Básica "Ángel de la Guarda" en Tulcán, utilizando un enfoque cualitativo y explicativo. Se recolectaron muestras de producción oral de los estudiantes en diferentes contextos y se aplicaron cuestionarios y entrevistas a estudiantes y docentes para identificar los factores influyentes. Entre los factores que influyen en el desarrollo de la interlengua se encuentran la edad de inicio de la adquisición de la lengua objetivo, el nivel de competencia lingüística en la lengua materna, la exposición a la lengua objetivo y las actitudes y motivaciones hacia el aprendizaje del inglés. Basado en estos hallazgos, se diseñaron estrategias de enseñanza y aprendizaje que incluyen la enseñanza explícita de la pronunciación y entonación, el uso de tecnologías educativas, la promoción del aprendizaje autónomo y la interacción oral constante. La investigación concluye que la implementación de estas estrategias puede mejorar significativamente la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes, contribuyendo a la formación de docentes y a la mejora de los materiales didácticos y políticas educativas en el contexto ecuatoriano.

Palabras clave:

Interlengua, pronunciación, entonación, enseñanza de inglés, Educación Básica Superior.



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INTRODUCTION

English plays a crucial role as a foreign language in Ecuador; however, many students face significant difficulties in developing accurate pronunciation and intonation. This problem can be attributed to several interrelated factors, such as limited exposure to English spoken by native speakers, the influence of the mother tongue on the production of sounds and rhythms, and the lack of detailed instruction in phonetics and phonology in the context of the EFL classroom.

The problem of this topic lies in the need to understand how interlanguage affects EFL learners' pronunciation and intonation, and how teachers can address this issue in the classroom to improve students' phonetic and phonological performance. This involves investigating the characteristics of interlanguage on students' pronunciation and intonation, as well as exploring teaching strategies and techniques that can help overcome the difficulties associated with interlanguage in these areas. According to Selinker (1972), interlanguage is an intermediate linguistic system that second language learners develop that may include persistent errors.

Pronunciation and intonation in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Ecuador is relevant in the current educational context. English has become an indispensable tool for international communication, access to information, and academic and labor mobility. However, many Ecuadorian students face difficulties in developing accurate pronunciation and intonation, which affects their communicative performance and limits their opportunities for success in academic and professional contexts, educational processes represent the means of transmission of culturally contextual information (science, technology, and art) (Paredes-Riera, 2020).

One of the factors contributing to this problem is the limited exposure to English spoken by native speakers. In Ecuador, most students learn English in formal contexts, such as the classroom, and have little opportunity to interact with native speakers of the language. This limits their ability to develop proper pronunciation and intonation, as they have no authentic, natural model to imitate. In addition, limited exposure to spoken English also affects listening to comprehension, making it even more difficult to learn pronunciation and intonation (Krashen, 1985; García Mayo, 2020). Lack of interaction with native speakers not only affects pronunciation, but also students' confidence in speaking English, which can generate a negative feedback loop where lack of practice leads to less confidence and thus less willingness to speak.

Interlanguage, i.e., the linguistic system that learners develop when learning a second language, also plays an

important role in the problem of pronunciation and intonation in EFL. Interlanguage is a natural process in second language learning, but it can generate pronunciation and intonation errors that become fossilized, i.e., persist despite additional exposure and instruction (Betancourt González & Alvarado Martínez, 2020; Chidi-Onwuta, 2024).

Therefore, it is necessary to understand how interlanguage affects EFL learners' pronunciation and intonation, and how teachers can address this issue in the classroom to improve students' phonetic and phonological performance (Selinker, 1972). Interlanguage can be particularly problematic when errors become fossilized, making it even more difficult to correct and improve pronunciation and intonation (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020; Guo, 2022).

The problem of pronunciation and intonation in learning English as a foreign language in Ecuador is a complex issue that requires special attention from teachers and students. The pedagogical reality of our country can be identified in three stages, each marked by the challenges of historical moments, this confirms that pedagogy is not a standardized discipline but rather a 'contextualized' one (Paredes Riera & Rivera Burgos, 2020).

The limited exposure to English spoken by native speakers, the influence of the mother tongue on the production of sounds and rhythms, and the lack of detailed instruction in phonetics and phonology are factors that contribute to this problem. To address it, it is necessary to implement teaching strategies and techniques that enable students to develop adequate phonemic and phonological awareness, such as explicit instruction in English phonetics and phonology, exposure to English spoken by native speakers, and phonetic remediation techniques. In this way, it will be possible to improve the phonetic and phonological performance of EFL students in Ecuador and contribute to their academic and professional success in international contexts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research will be carried out in the basic education school "Ángel de la Guarda" located in the city of Tulcán, which is a private educational entity, which has basic, middle and higher basic education. It corresponds to the District Directorate 04D01 San Pedro de Huaca - Tulcán, of Sierra regime, with presential modality and morning shift.

A population of 20 teachers will be taken into account, of which two of them will be taken as a sample, who are the ones who teach the different years of initial education, likewise, the population of students will be taken into account, being a total of 300 students, taking as our sample,

the students belonging to the eighth and ninth grades, which make up a total of 21 students.

Approach and type of research

The present research is framed within a qualitative approach, since it seeks to understand and describe in depth the phenomenon of interlanguage in the pronunciation and intonation of adolescent students of English as a foreign language. This approach allows exploring the experiences, perceptions and attitudes of students and teachers involved in the English teaching-learning process, as well as the contexts in which this process takes place.

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2018), the qualitative approach is characterized by its emphasis on the detailed understanding and description of social and educational phenomena, through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and documents. In this sense, the present research is framed within a qualitative approach, as it seeks to understand and describe in depth the phenomenon of interlanguage in the pronunciation and intonation of adolescent learners of English as a foreign language, exploring the experiences, perceptions and attitudes of students and teachers involved in the teaching-learning process of English, as well as the contexts in which this process takes place (Muho & Kurani, 2014; Santos de Lima et al., 2021; Windle & Amorim Possas, 2023).

As mentioned above, the present research is framed within a qualitative approach and, specifically, it is explanatory research. According to Hernández et al. (2014), explanatory research is characterized by seeking to identify and analyze the causes and consequences of a phenomenon, as well as the factors that influence it. In this case, the research focuses on the phenomenon of interlanguage in the pronunciation and intonation of adolescent learners of English as a foreign language, and seeks to explain the causes and consequences of this phenomenon, as well as the factors that influence its development.

To achieve this objective, qualitative techniques and tools will be used, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews and content analysis of didactic materials and students' written and oral productions. These techniques will allow the collection of detailed and contextualized information on the phenomenon studied, as well as on the experiences, perceptions and attitudes of students and teachers involved in the English teaching-learning process.

Definition and operationalization of variables

Definition and operationalization of qualitative variables

Independent variable:

In this research, the independent variable is interlanguage, defined as the linguistic system that emerges in the process of second language acquisition, as a result of the interaction between the mother tongue and the target language. This variable is operationalized through the identification and analysis of pronunciation and intonation errors made by students in their oral productions in English, as well as the identification of the linguistic and contextual factors that influence such errors.

Dependent variables:

The dependent variables of this research are pronunciation and intonation in English as a foreign language, defined as students' ability to produce appropriate sounds and prosodic patterns in the target language. These variables are operationalized through the collection and analysis of samples of students' oral production in different contexts and communicative tasks, as well as the assessment of their level of phonetic and prosodic competence in the target language.

Intervening variables:

The intervening variables in this research are those that can affect the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables. In this case, the following intervening variables have been identified:

Age of onset of target language acquisition refers to the age at which students began learning English as a foreign language. This variable may influence the degree to which the mother tongue influences the interlanguage and the learners' ability to acquire adequate pronunciation and intonation in the target language.

Level of linguistic competence in the mother tongue: This refers to the degree of proficiency that students have in their mother tongue. This variable can influence the degree of linguistic transfer from the mother tongue to the interlanguage and the learners' ability to perceive and produce appropriate sounds and prosodic patterns in the target language.

Exposure to the target language refers to the amount and quality of exposure students have to English as a foreign language, both inside and outside the classroom. This variable can influence the degree of interlanguage development and students' ability to acquire appropriate pronunciation and intonation in the target language.

Attitudes and motivations toward the target language refers to the attitudes and motivations that students have toward learning English as a foreign language. This variable can influence the degree of effort and commitment students put into the target language acquisition process and students' ability to overcome interlanguage challenges (Ma et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The assessment of the students’ overall pronunciation revealed an interesting distribution in terms of phonetic proficiency. 27.3% of the students scored a 4, indicating clear and accurate pronunciation in all words, suggesting advanced proficiency in English pronunciation. This group of students has likely had greater exposure to English spoken by native speakers and has developed more advanced phonemic awareness. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2020), pronunciation instruction is crucial for effective communication and should be an integral part of the language teaching curriculum (Table 1).

Table 1: General pronunciation.

Punctuation	Students	Percentage
4	3	27.3%
3	5	45.5%
2	3	27.3%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the results obtained

Forty-five.5% of the students scored 3, indicating generally clear pronunciation with some minor errors. This group represents the most students and suggests that, although they have an intermediate level of pronunciation, they still need improvement in certain areas. The transfer of phonetic features from the native language to English is a common phenomenon that may account for these errors (Lado, 1957).

The remaining 27.3% scored a 2, indicating understandable pronunciation, but with several errors that affect clarity. These students need more practice and specific strategies to improve their pronunciation. Explicit teaching of English phonetics and phonology, along with exposure to English spoken by native speakers, may be beneficial for this group (Celce et al., 2020).

The analysis of the /t/ sound showed that 36.4% of the students pronounce this sound correctly in words such as “text” and “it”, obtaining a score of 4. This group has mastered the production of the /t/ sound, which is crucial for a clear pronunciation in English. 54.5% of the students scored 3, indicating a pronunciation of the /t/ sound with some minor errors. These errors may be due to the influence of the native language, where the /t/ sound may have a different realization (Table 2).

Table 2: Sound /t/.

Punctuation	Students	Percentage
4	4	36.4%
3	6	54.5%
2	1	9.1%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the results obtained

As can be seen in Table 2, 91.7% of the students scored 2, indicating several errors in the pronunciation of the /t/ sound. For these students, it is advisable to focus on basic pronunciation exercises and repetition of common words and phrases containing the /t/ sound. Repetitive practice can help internalize the correct production of the sound (Levis, 2020).

The /θ/ sound, which does not exist in Spanish, presented a significant challenge for the students. No student scored a 4, indicating that all had difficulty with this sound. 27.3% of the students scored a 3, suggesting a pronunciation of the /θ/ sound with some minor errors. 63.6% obtained a score of 2, indicating several errors in the pronunciation of the /θ/ sound. Finally, 9.1% scored 1, indicating multiple errors in the pronunciation of the /θ/ sound (Table 3).

Table 3: Sound /θ/.

Punctuation	Students	Percentage
4	0	0%
3	3	27.3%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the results obtained

Difficulty with the /θ/ sound can be attributed to the lack of a native language equivalent, resulting in learners having to learn to produce a completely new sound. Explicit teaching of this sound, along with the use of visual and auditory tools, can be beneficial in improving the pronunciation of the /θ/ sound (Levis, 2020).

The analysis of the /d/ sound showed that 36.4% of the students pronounce this sound correctly in words such as “different” and “and”, obtaining a score of 4. 45.5% of the students obtained a score of 3, indicating a pronunciation of the /d/ sound with some minor errors. The remaining 18.2% obtained a score of 2, indicating several errors in the pronunciation of the /d/ sound (Table 4).



Table 4: Sound /d/.

Punctuation	Students	Percentage
4	4	36.4%
3	5	45.5%
2	2	18.2%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the results obtained

Correct pronunciation of the /d/ sound is crucial for clear communication in English. The transfer of phonetic features from the native language to English may account for errors in the production of the /d/ sound. Repetitive practice of words and phrases containing the /d/ sound can help improve pronunciation of this sound (Levis, 2020).

The /ɪ/ sound, present in words such as “is” and “it,” also presented challenges for the students. 36.4% of the students pronounced this sound correctly, obtaining a score of 4. 45.5% of the students obtained a score of 3, indicating a pronunciation of the /ɪ/ sound with some minor errors. The remaining 18.2% obtained a score of 2, indicating several errors in the pronunciation of the /ɪ/ sound (Table 5).

Table 5: Sound /ɪ/.

Punctuation	Students	Percentage
4	4	36.4%
3	5	45.5%
2	2	18.2%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the results obtained

Correct pronunciation of the /ɪ/ sound is important for clear communication in English. The transfer of phonetic features from the native language to English may account for errors in the production of the /ɪ/ sound. Repetitive practice of words and phrases containing the /ɪ/ sound can help improve pronunciation of this sound (Levis, 2020).

The analysis of intonation showed that 36.4% of the students have adequate and natural intonation, reflecting the meaning and structure of the text, obtaining a score of 4. 45.5% of the students obtained a score of 3, indicating generally adequate intonation with some minor variations. The remaining 18.2% scored 2, indicating several variations in intonation that affect clarity (Table 6).

Table 6: Intonation.

Punctuation	Students	Percentage
4	4	36.4%
3	5	45.5%
2	2	18.2%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the results obtained

Intonation is a crucial aspect of oral communication, as it can change the meaning of a sentence and affect the listener's understanding. The transfer of intonation patterns from the native language to English can account for variations in learners' intonation. Explicit teaching of intonation, along with practicing intonation drills and exposure to authentic language models, can be beneficial in improving learners' intonation (Levis, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Interlanguage, defined as the intermediate language system that learners develop when learning a second language, plays a crucial role in learners' pronunciation and intonation. The transfer of phonetic and phonological features from the native language to English is a common phenomenon that significantly affects the accuracy and clarity of oral production.

Several factors influence interlanguage development, including age of onset of target language acquisition, level of language proficiency in the native language, exposure to the target language, and attitudes and motivations toward learning English. These factors should be considered when designing teaching and learning strategies.

The implementation of specific teaching strategies, such as the explicit teaching of pronunciation and intonation, the use of educational technologies, and the promotion of autonomous learning, can significantly improve students' communicative competence. Constant feedback and individualized practice are essential to correct errors and improve speech fluency.

Ongoing teacher training in phonetics and phonology is essential for teachers to teach these skills effectively. Teachers must be trained to identify and address errors in pronunciation and intonation, and to use appropriate teaching tools and resources.

This research provides empirical evidence on the influence of interlanguage on pronunciation and intonation, contributing to the existing literature and providing practical recommendations for teaching English as a foreign language. The findings can be used to improve teaching



materials and educational policies in the Ecuadorian context and beyond.

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