ESL Pronunciation Issues Among Talking Chihuahuas

by

Taquito H. Bell

LING 450
Introduction to Linguistics Research Methods

Professor Mortimer Snerd

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

15 December 2008
ESL Pronunciation Issues Among Talking Chihuahuas

by

Taquito H. Bell

submitted to

Professor Mortimer Snerd

LING 450

Introduction to Linguistics Research Methods

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

15 December 2008
ESL Pronunciation Issues Among Talking Chihuahuas

Acquisition of spoken languages by canines represents an area of language acquisition research that has received relatively minor attention. Canine language acquisition has largely been successful in the receptive domain, that is, comprehension of simple sentences and commands, which involve rather simple syntax (Davidson, 1999). It is not clear whether canines are capable of processing morphological forms in languages with more complex verbal morphology or noun case endings such as Latin or Russian, as these have not been adequately studied. Most studies have focused on comprehension studies of canines for simple command forms in languages such as English and German (Rottweiler, 2001; Davidson, 1999). The difficulties faced by canines in learning productive skills in spoken languages seem poorly understood, as relatively few canines have achieved proficiency or fluency in language, despite thousands of hours of verbal input provided by their human caretakers, leading to considerable puzzlement or frustration among their human caretakers. Theories for the particular difficulties faced by canine language learners include a special canine critical period hypothesis, whereby canines face a much earlier, stronger, and poorly understood critical period effect for language; the socio-motivational hypothesis, according to which canines feel no need for language learning; and physiological hypotheses that posit that canines cannot overcome significant physiological barriers to language learning.

A few members have achieved some success, such as the well known chihuahuas featured in popular commercial advertisements, who despite being raised in Anglophone environments, nonetheless exhibit distinct Spanish accents in their English pronunciation. This stands in contrast to case studies of language acquisition among other species such as Mr. Ed the Talking Horse (Post, 1962), showing no such