

Title – Uncovering Linguistic Patterns in Tongue Twisters of Different Languages.

Program of Study – Teaching English as a Second Language

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Abstract: Tongue Twisters can be defined as: a word string implementing sound similarity and/or repetition usually of the same initial sound that is said several times over a fast rate (Wilshire, 1999, p.58). To most people tongue twisters are simply a fun task; however, studying the speech sounds involved in the slips of the tongue caused by tongue twisters can give us a peek into the native speaker’s subconscious knowledge of their own language. There have been a few case studies done on the topic of tongue twisters; some contributors include Carolyn E Wilshire (1999) and Sieb Nooteboom & Hugo Quené (2015). Both studies come to the same conclusion: more errors occur in segments when the same or similar sounds are repeated, and these errors most commonly occur word-initially. For example, in the tongue twister “she sells sea shells” the initial sounds of the words in the phrase are usually swapped. This is one observed principle of Tongue Twisters; however, the challenge of this research is to go beyond that. Five different languages will be investigated in this study; English, Polish, French, Vietnamese and Chinese. Each of these languages have been chosen because of their varying phonotactic constraints which define the speech sounds that can and cannot be produced in each language. English, Polish, and French have less constraints than other languages on the number of consonants they allow to occur in a row. These complex consonant clusters may play a role in

the production of tongue twisters. Vietnamese and Chinese are unique because they both use tones to distinguish words. This study will investigate the use of these pitch patterns to create more difficult strings. The goal of this study is to broaden our knowledge of tongue twisters and the underlying principles involved in their difficulty. The knowledge of these principles can then serve as a pedagogical tool for teaching language phonology.

References

Nooteboom, S., & Quene, H. (2015). *Word-Onsets and Stress Patterns: Speech Errors in a Tongue-Twister Experiment*. Utrecht: Utrecht Institute of Linguistics.

Wilshire, C. E. (1999). The “Tongue Twister” Paradigm as a Technique for Studying Phonological Encoding. *Language and Speech*, 42(1), 57–82.

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