

English Pronunciation and Its Shortcomings: How to Overcome

Reena Mittal

Department of English, DAK Degree College, Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

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Abstract

The teaching of English as a second language has always been a challenge for teachers. In India, we have large classrooms with more students coming from non-English speaking background. Their economic condition is not favourable and schools and institutes are not really equipped for teaching language properly. Students learn English as a Subject from the beginning of their schooling. This makes their understanding of language poor. English has to be taught as a language, not as a subject. A language can be learnt by three genres: Reading, Writing and Speaking. Mainly the genre that effects is Pronunciation. Students learn to speak all by their own without expert speaking aid. Teachers also face problems of large classrooms so they can't give attention to each student and their pronunciation. Literature has its sublimity whereas language as a responsibility. Language teaching is not only for teaching, learning or passing the examination but for communicative purposes. The paper is an attempt to trace the problems and issues related Pronunciation in western Uttar Pradesh and Northern India. It includes problems of students and teachers both. The paper gives some useful suggestions and solutions for pronunciation mistakes with emphasis on the use of Pronchart at the beginning of English teaching. In the present era when technology has become an indispensable part of teaching, the use of Pronchart is really easy and making wonderful innovations. It also suggests that the pronunciation can be improved with muscular movements. Our facial muscles and their movements are important when we speak.

1. Introduction

English Pronunciation and Its Shortcomings: How to Overcome.

English has become a lingua franca these days. In the era of globalisation, we even can't think of surviving without speaking, reading and writing in English. In India, English is being taught at the beginning of schooling, but it is really sad that English is not taught as a language but as a subject. So, students cram it; pass their examination without even knowing its basics and rules. They can't read, write and speak English. Their speaking skills are not cultivated properly. They are not properly exposed to speaking. They don't know the sounds alphabets produced and the union of alphabets produced. In all these circumstances, students can't pronounce properly. I have observed that many of pronunciation problems are area based. It looks as if people of a particular area have localised the pronunciation. As, if you travel in Haryana and its surrounding, you will find a sound missing in 'O.' The words like 'Dollar', 'Collar' and other matching words, miss the sound of 'O'. They pronounce 'O' in a different way. Similarly, in my college I noticed a blunder that students speak 'literature' as 'litleture'. They miss 'r' sound and produce 'l' sound. This is not only the problem of my college but other colleges of my city too. So, Pronunciation errors are really making language a blending of Mother Tongue and Second Language. But it is not really good. When one has to interact internationally, it looks awkward to speak in localised accent with lots of pronunciation mistakes.

2. English Speaking and Constraints

Corresponding Author,

E-mail address: mittal.reena23@gmail.com

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Today's youth is not the citizen of any particular country, but they have become Global Youth. So, there is a need for some link language which one can read, write and speak perfectly. English is no doubt, a link language of the Global world. One has to speak it fluently; if he/she wants to cross borders for Professional Growth. Of all the variant of language i.e. Reading, writing, speaking; speaking is the toughest thing as it needs the command over brain, tongue and facial movements. So, it is necessary to practice speaking. In India, we lack speaking practices in our curriculum. English is introduced at schooling as a subject in Regional level schools whereas convent/Public schools teach all subjects in English. So, mode of Instruction in English makes students really well versed in it. But as a matter of fact Pronunciation errors are not erased. We lack many structural flaws in our system as when Second language learning is concerned. Some of them pointed by my personal teaching experience are:

- Lack of language labs in schools and Institutions.
- Lack of skilled Trainers.
- Student Teacher Ratio is high.
- Lack of speaking practices in syllabus and curriculum.
- A language has to be taught as a language in which emphasis has to be given to Reading, Writing and Speaking.
- Lack of Audio-Video based teaching.

3. Common Problems of Pronunciation We Face

- Pronunciation of silent letters.
- Pronunciation of combined words.
- Producing some other sound is the beginning or end of the word.

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- Students don't know that some words remain silent as 'Folk' (l) is silent,
- Many a time double words such as 'cc', 'ae' sometimes produced not the sound of that word but give birth to a different word.
- People produce sound of 'l' at the beginning of words starting with 's' and sound of 'y' in the words ending with 'm'.

These pronunciation problems make the language teaching challenging sometimes. In the present times, when our students have to compete in the global world, sometimes these errors make situations funny for them. They lose opportunities just for their speaking inabilities. My survey in the schools of Uttar Pradesh has made it clear to me that speaking is not practised in our curriculum. So, student's foundation becomes weak as they learn pronunciation incorrectly at the beginning. It really becomes difficult and tough to change that wrong pronunciation into the right one.

4. Use of Modern Devices

My recent training experience at Oxford University makes me aware of English language teaching in a new way. I learned new techniques which are helpful in the English language Teaching. There, we have been introduced to the concept of 'Pronchart' which is really helpful. It teaches Alphabets and their sounds, combination of two alphabets and sounds they produced and above all use of 'Schwa' which are most important. Sound of 'Schwa' is very important because normally students make mistakes in its pronunciation.

Pronunciation exercises and teachings have become secondary when language teaching is concerned other than grammar and lexis as it is not considered a technical part of language teaching. The reasons for the negligence of Pronunciation are: lack of guidelines and rules in the curriculum and large classrooms with insufficient time for speaking and Reading exercises. For Teachers and students both it is a mysterious zone because rules are not defined and no progress is made despite English becoming more and more popular day by day.

5. Use of Physical Movements

The first thing which we teachers have to consider is the need of physical movements in pronunciation. There are certain muscles of throat and mouth which move from a certain area to a particular area. If we can identify them and move our muscles accordingly, Our Pronunciation will be apt and appropriate. We can take the example of Dance, Aerobics and other physical Exercises.

The non-native learners can very well adapt these physical movements and make their pronunciation better. There are four parts of the mouth which involve speaking: Tongue which move both upward and backward; Lips which back, round, forward, spread and open; Jaws which connote with tongue and finally our voice which sometimes comes and sometimes remain silent.

The main hindrance is that teachers don't have a clear concept to give direction to students. They don't find it important to use physical movements. Normally pronunciation is taught with the help of practice and repetition. It is not a bad idea, but repetition has to be

scientifically monitored so that all the problems may be erased.

6. Technology and Pronunciation

English has its own unique set of sounds which is called Phonology. To non-native speakers, sounds of a word may be different in their native language but they are different in English. So, to learn and speak fluent and flawless English, one has to learn English accent and pronunciation. In the present technological Era we have many Pronunciation training websites, software and Online programmes which work as self-study tools and provide:-

- Recorded words and their correct sound.
- Pronunciation of words and tips of improvement.
- Similar words with similar and different sounds as Dip/deep, bed/bad.
- Recordings which can give practice for different sounds.
- There are videos, which not only show pronunciation but our movements of the mouth, tongue and other parts.

These are highly useful tools for the improvement of Accent and Pronunciation. There is a list given below which tells some useful links for practicing pronunciation:-

<http://www.pronunciationworkshop.com/products/video-live-training>

<http://www.howtoimproveenglishspeaking.org/article/exercises-to-help-pronunciation-the-first-english-speaking-tutorial/>

http://www.ehow.com/list_6616814_pronunciation-exercises-english.html

<http://www.speakmethod.com/accentswarmup.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDinQsEgR4I>

<http://www.speakmethod.com/video5CWlsecond>

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/pronunciation-poor-relation>

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teaching-schwa>

7. Improving English Pronunciation

The most important thing is to speak clear and correct English, not imitating and English accent. So, the aim of the learner has to be:

- Listen to some 'model speakers' means some good orators, Experts who speak flawless English.
- Learn Pronchart and Phonetic Alphabet and use as a guide.
- It is important to learn word stress in each sentence as each English word has stress. Sometimes, we stress first syllabus and other time we stress second syllabus. So, it's really important to know stress otherwise wrong stress make wrong pronunciation.
- Our native language also plays a vital role in pronunciation as speakers of Hindi have problems of /r/ and /l/, whereas Tamilians has problems of /T/ and /Th/.
- Silent words and their pronunciation are also important and some spellings are different in written and speaking pattern. It is very much needed to recognise them.
- One has to speak in normal speed because speaking fast will skip words or make them unclear and speaking slow looks awkward.

8. Some Tips for Better English Speaking

- Regular and continuous practise.
- Don't spend quality time, spent Quantity time.
- Speak slowly at the beginning of learning.
- Make small sentences.
- Speak in front of the mirror and listen to your own voice.
- If you have the facility to record your speech and listen to it, you will find your mistakes yourself. It will be easier to correct it.
- Use of Pronchart with the help of audio aids is really worthwhile. Students can download in their laptops and Android phones and learn them.
- Don't experiment, learn the correct pronunciation only.
- If you have any confusion take expert help.
- Always check your pronunciation of any new word you learn, it will give confidence to you.
- Listen speeches of leaders, Orators and News readers to get a good spoken output.
- Use TV, Podcasts, Audio Aids, Mobiles and other devices.

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- Sound of 'Schwa' is also important to learn as it really helps to make the correct sound in each word.
- Listen to the Music and songs in English as Music is the melody and food of life and help in getting words easily with rhythm and intonation.
- Last but not the least, one must think in English before speaking not in native language because translating some thought may sometimes break fluency and accuracy both.

Pronunciation is a continuous learning process as is a language. Use of lexicography makes it challenging always. The urgent change which needs to be implemented in the institutions is to introduce English not as a subject but as a Language. English is not the language of Britain or America anyone, but it is a connecting language of the World. Our state (U.P.) is facing some challenges when we talk about fluency of Reading, Writing and Speaking. English Speaking is the weakest point. There are some problems which really need attention of Teachers and students apart from infrastructural absence. So, we teachers and students can collaborate and work on our weaknesses and make them our strength in the time to come.

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