

Teaching and Testing English Pronunciation

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Abstract

‘I know my words and grammar were good, but nobody would understand me, just because of my pronunciation’ (Antimoon.com). If the learners cannot hear well, they are cut off from language. If they cannot be understood, they are cut off from conversation with native and non- native speakers. One of the problems that has been faced by the teachers teaching English to speakers of other languages is that many students in India simply come to college without having the basic knowledge of how they speak in English. However, a lot of students who speak English perfectly well with their mother tongue accent are not intelligible to everyone. Therefore, if the students are given the training to correct their pronunciation to have an overall development in communication, it gives positive results. This paper deals with Teaching and Testing English Pronunciation with twenty students who belong to Andhra Pradesh for a period of two months.

Introduction

“English Pronunciation involves individual sounds, word stress, sentence stress and intonation; all influence the sound of spoken English”(37). English pronunciation involves too many complexities for learners but improving pronunciation will boost self esteem and possibly lead to have a overall communication development that leads to get a better job and more respect in the work place. The truth that English pronunciation teaching and testing has been neglected from primary to tertiary levels. It is mainly due to the teachers, lacking interest in the subject also have feelings of doubt on how to teach and test it.

Since English has been taught and continue to be taught in India, it is necessary to have spoken English as an integral part of the course. Learners need not know the phonetics of the language but the minimum expectation should be the ability on their part to speak such English which must be intelligible not only to their own country man but also to those who use English as their mother tongue. For this, they should be able to produce clearly all the sounds that exist in the language and also to distinguish those sounds when a native speaker produces them. In short, they should be able to speak the normal accepted English which can be understood everywhere.

If English is taught, it should be taught properly, here proper teaching means giving due recognition to the spoken form of the language. A large number of our students go to English speaking countries every year for higher studies and specialized training courses and they can do much better if they use English effectively both written and spoken. When any communication takes place between them and with the native speakers the rate of intelligibility is very low. It affects the purpose of their studies especially in acquisition of knowledge.

The problem of intelligibility arises not only when our students go out of this country, but also within the country. Sometimes the English of an Indian speaker from one part of the country is unintelligible to another speaker from a different region because both have the typical regional accent. This is a matter of common experience. In order to be intelligible, they need not speak the received pronunciation of English but they are expected to speak normal English with correct pronunciation. In fact, pronunciation means much more than this. It means the production of various sounds in isolation as well as in words and it is fully connected with speech. The major problem for our students is to learn a better pronunciation that is to be able to speak English better. When the learners come to the university stage, their speech habits are fixed and then they find it very difficult to erase the mother tongue accent.

Pronunciation is definitely the biggest thing that people notice when you are speaking in English. When you meet a person, you just say a sentence or two. Do you think they will notice your rich vocabulary and grammar? Probably not but they will notice if your pronunciation is good or bad. If your pronunciation is poor, they will immediately think about you as the guy or girl who speaks bad English. Because, our pronunciation gives the first impression. I would like to give an anecdote here. "Whenever I spoke to my students in multilingual class, they kept asking me "What? What? I would repeat my sentence again and again. Finally they would say Oh! Oh! And then they say my sentence using my words exactly" (97). It was very humiliating. "I knew my words and grammar were good, but nobody would understand me, just because of my pronunciation" (Antimoon.com). Almost all English learners say "I don't need to study pronunciation but just want to communicate in English" (21).

Training Procedure

Twenty students, who belong to Andhra Pradesh having different social set up, were taken for two months training in my class. The pre-test was conducted

before the commencement of the training. Very simple daily used individual words and connected speech were taken as the source material for the training. Every day one hour training was given. At first, the training was on individual words then slowly started with connected speech. In the initial stage, many students pronounced perfectly well with their regional accent that was not pleasant to hear. For example.

- Government as governament
- World as warald
- Third as tharadu
- Book as booku
- Order as arder
- Father as fatharu
- Against as aganest
- Bus as bassu
- Bird as birdu
- Going as goingu

Students had been out of interest and enthusiasm in the first week of the class. However, when they started realizing the importance of pronunciation to have overall development in English communication, they genuinely started practicing as per my instruction. At first, they were asked to select the frequently used words. Then they presented the words in front of their class mates in the class. If they did not pronounce it correctly, they were corrected with drilling method. As a result, I could find a gradual improvement in their pronunciation. Among the twenty students, only thirteen students improved a lot in one month it is because they had their school education in cities and also their social set up is comparatively rich. The rest of the students improved very slowly. The reason for that is their school education was not good and also their social set up that never motivates them to learn anything. After two months of the training post test was conducted that shows the excellent improvements.

Recommendations

- Learning pronunciation requires an enormous amount of practice especially at early stage. It is recommended for learners to repeat a particular word, phrase or sentence as many times as possible before really they feel comfortable with it.
- It is not so important to spend a lot time practicing in one day. It is more important to do it regularly. In my experience, instead of practicing for three or

more hours every day, it is better to practice for one hour and then start again the next day and continue it regularly.

- While listening to the native speakers in television program, pay attention to the sounds they pronounce.
- One helpful technique is to record your voice and compare it with the correct pronunciation. This way, you can see where your pronunciation is different from the original and you can make it gradually more native like.
- It is advisable to imitate when you listen to the good speech.
- Read aloud to polish the pronunciation of difficult words.
- Drill yourself to get the best universally accepted pronunciation.

Conclusion

One basic assumption of this paper is a genuine desire on the part of the students to learn and on the part of the teacher to teach. Selecting, presenting, correcting and drilling are the best methods to teach pronunciation. In this paper, a set of students have been taught English pronunciation and tested properly. This also attempts to give the problems faced by a set of students who belong to Andhra Pradesh in speaking English and also how they improved their pronunciation to have the overall communication development with the practical methods of learning. It is hoped that this paper really will lead to a great awareness and understanding because uniformity in pronunciation is the social requirement.

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