

The Need of Teaching Effective English Pronunciation at School level

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Abstract

This study is focused on the need of teaching effective English Pronunciation at School Level. The problem of wrong Pronunciation at fundamental level has captured the attention of many and puts a severe interrogation upon the educationists, academicians and intellectuals. The onus lies primarily upon school teachers and demands enormous updating upon their part. The purpose of this study is to highlight some of the techniques teachers can adopt for getting good results. Four questions were formulated to guide the study. In order to analyse the need of teaching effective English pronunciation, we described the role of exact pronunciation and five steps of pronunciation. After that we elaborated the techniques of teaching English pronunciation. The deteriorating conditions regarding speaking English can be noticed among school students, as many of them are unable to pronounce words, do spellings and sentences correctly and effectively. This can be done through new ways of hearing, by using speech organs and new speech habits. This paper provides some effective strategies for the teachers to endeavor better.

Key-words: Articulatory Terms, Phonetic, Received Pronunciation, Recognition Drills, Production Drills, Minimal Pair and Intonation.

Introduction

In this Global world to come closer everybody needs the bridge of language to cover the gaps created by geographical and cultural boundaries. Catering to this need, the linguistic community has unanimously made a selection of medium of expression i.e English language. English as a language has acquired the status of Global language, the fastest mean of expression in social media, news broadcast, entertainment and mass communication. In each private and public Domain, nobody can do without English. Keeping in view the significance of this language, this paper is an attempt to lessen the lacuna and shortcomings that have entered into teaching of English. To imbibe the verbal knowledge of English among school level students should not be

the sole aim of the teachers; therefore they should come out with the new strategies and new ready made tool kits to impart this skill among students.

...the teachers face many obstacles including insufficient English language skills. As for learners, they wish they could speak English fluently but most of them think that English is too challenging for them to be competent because of interference from the mother tongue particularly in pronunciation and being too shy to speak English. **(Biyaem, 1997:36)**

The deteriorating conditions regarding English speaking can be noticed among school students, where they are not able to pronounce the words, spellings and sentences exactly and effectively. The paper is a move in this direction providing some effective strategy for the teachers to make their endeavor an excellent one. Though there are great hurdles, as English is not native language in India, the children acquire their first accent from mother's lap or surrounding ambiance and by default they pick the native or regional language full of slang and cockney expressions. Even after school training, they acquire the guts to write, the styles of composition and vocabulary, but their usage of English as a mode of verbal expression cannot grasp the quintessence of language. Here the sanctity of language is being broken.

The main challenge of English pronunciation is to build a new set of habits corresponding to the sounds of English and to break down the old habits of speech which are attached due to the long and consecutive usage of native language. This can be done by establishing new ways of hearing, new ways of using our speech organs, new speech habits. But it is not as simple as it seems. The teacher will have to put in an arduous labour and the pupil will have to put in an intensive practice before one can be said to have acquired intelligible and socially acceptable pronunciation of English. The purpose of this study is to highlight some of the techniques which the teacher can adopt and apply upon the students for getting good results.

The Role of Pronunciation

One can claim that speech, like writing, constitutes no more than the transmission phase of language. It provides a set of signalling system for the languages, defined in the lexicon and containing syntactic rules found in the grammar. Yet high adequacy in lexis and grammar can be traced through incompetence in the signalling phase, when the prime medium is speech. Unless a learner expects to deal with English only in its written form, there is no escape from the acquisition of at least the rudimentary elements of English pronunciation. Such a conclusion implies that in any course of English a considerable amount of time should be devoted to practice in the spoken language.

However, the teaching of pronunciation presents particular difficulties. So, the teacher must deal systematically with the teaching of pronunciation, even though he may be forced to postpone the correction of some mistakes which occur in the early stages. In organizing his teaching he will require answers to such questions as:

- What form of right pronunciation is to be considered as model?
- What level of performance he is aiming at?
- Do the difficulties of English pronunciation have an ordered and structured frame?
- What general principles should be framed and which guidelines should be followed while teaching of English pronunciation?

The purpose of speech is the right reception by audience. One speaks in order generally to be heard. The use of speech for any other purpose, for example, in loud thinking, is rare. Normally, therefore, when we produce a speech sound, we intend it to be transmitted and heard. So we can negotiate that there are apparently three stages at which a speech sound can be studied:

1. The production stage
2. The transmission stage
3. The reception stage

So the teacher should describe how the speech organs act in order to produce a given sound (articulatory terms); what physical properties it has; and what features of it are perceived by the listener. Pronunciation is a very important factor in the speech process (spoken language) when the speaker achieves the goal to communicate effectively by being understood. The speech process is a process that involves several stages, beginning with the speaker's ideas and ending with the understanding of those ideas by the listener (Dauer, 1993).

As the purpose of the present study is to aid the teaching of pronunciation. It imparts a description of sounds mainly in articulatory terms and partly in auditory terms. The sounds regarded as 'consonants' are best described in terms of their articulation, and those regarded as 'vowels' in terms of both their articulation and auditory impressions.

Basic Steps of Right Pronunciation

- **The Native Speaker:** The native speaker normally has a fundamental stability in his habits of speech production; he has considerable and consistent ability in the reception and comprehension of other forms of English which show marked divergences in their phonetic and phonological characteristics. There is no doubt that such receptive efficiency has been brought about half a century ago through aural exposure via-media television and broadcast in particular to most of the important spoken forms of language.

- **The Foreign Learner:** It is rare for the foreign learner, usually acquiring English in an artificial and intermittent fashion, to approach the native's receptive and productive competence. But, whatever abilities the learner may acquire in the later stages of learning English, he will be advised at the beginning to model his productive performance on but one type of spoken English, without any conscious attempt to alter his pronunciation according to style or situation in the way that the native speaker does, but restricting himself to the main frame.
- **A Wider Based Received Pronunciation (RP):** RP must be regarded as an evolving mode of pronunciation in its phonological system, its phonetic realization and the incidence of its phonemes. Certainly the specification of RP as the property of a single social class within a restricted geographical location is no longer valid. Still in India, there is wider range and possibility of amalgamation of regional language with the acquired foreign language. It is now realistic to allow considerable dilution in the original concept of the RP speaker, with the consequent admission into the permitted speech forms of certain variants until recently regarded as regional.
- **Performance Targets:** There will however be many learners who, for academic reasons or because their work requires them to deal on equal terms with native speakers in Britain or abroad or even as tourists wish to communicate easily without signalling too blatantly their foreign origin. For them a mastery of English pronunciation and a ready understanding of a variety of English accents will not be enough; they must also expect to have a comprehensive command of syntax, including everyday elliptical structures, a wide ranging vocabulary and a deep acquaintance with English culture.
- **Choice of Basic Model:** The more realistic, immediate solution lies in the choice of one of the main natural forms of English as the basic model, eg. a representative form of British or American pronunciation. The decisive criteria in the choice of any teaching model must be that it has wide currency, is widely and readily understood, is adequately described in textbooks and has ample recorded material available for learner. In India, there is wider acceptance and popularity of British Model of pronunciation in school teaching.

Teaching of English Pronunciation: Some Techniques

A. Pronunciation Drills and Exercises: Two types of pronunciation drills have been found quite useful. These are:

1. Recognition Drills
2. Production Drills

- 1) **Recognition Drills and Exercises:** In a recognition drill, the pupil is required to identify a particular sound or sound unit (phoneme). There are a number of ways to identify one sound unit from another.

A. Identifying sounds in minimal pairs:

- a. The teacher speaks out a minimal pair and asks the pupils to point out whether a particular sound say /e/, occurs in the first word or in the second word, Eg.

Teacher	Pupil
Pet-Pit	First
Meat-Met	Second

- b. The teacher may give two words in minimal pair and ask the pupils to indicate whether they are 'same' or 'different' :Eg.

Teacher	Pupil
Bit-Bit	Same
Bid-Bit	Different

- B. Carrying out commands:** The pupils carry out certain commands given by the teacher; Eg;

The sound of 'g' in the sentence Open your bag.

The sound of 'e' in the sentence Give me your pen.

- C. Asking questions:** The teacher may ask his pupils certain questions to be answered in a single word in which particular sound occurs. Eg.

Teacher	Pupils
Did the sun rise/rice yesterday?	Rise
Did you get a price/prize?	Prize

- 2) **Production Drills and Exercises:** The second type of pronunciation drill is that of oral repetition, Here the pupils listen to the teacher demonstrating sound and sound sequences in words, phrases or sentences and then repeat them after him. The teacher corrects any wrong production of sound. Production drill should consist of three important steps:

- Teacher's demonstration
- Class or individual practice
- Teacher's correction, if any.

Examples:

- a) Minimal- pair drill: Know-now , Boat-bought

b) Sentence drill: I want a pen. I want a pin.

B. Stress and Intonation Drills: This consists in giving practice in different stress patterns, rhythm and intonation. Stress patterns should be drilled in isolated words as well as in sentences. Similarly, each intonation tune should be repeated to give the pupils fluency in rhythm. ‘Listen and Repeat’ is an important exercise to drill stress and rhythm and intonation patterns.

C. Reading Aloud: One of the two reasons given by **A.W. Frisby** in favour of reading aloud by pupils is that “it gives practice in the manipulation sounds, and practice in speech and pronunciation.” It not only reinforces silent reading but also is an effective means to an end in teaching pronunciation and a good method of testing pupil’s efficiency in speech.

Conclusion

There are multiple approaches to address and redress this problem of exact pronunciation but it is not possible to map them completely. The suggested exercise allows clear practice in production and reception of speech and gives concise feedback to individual learners as to where their problems lie in these areas and how to improve them. Often these are very simple physical questions such as not rounding the lips as in / u: / in fool, which the teacher can help them focus on. This, in turn, allows discussion on learning strategies for pronunciation which can be drawn up in the classroom. It is a communicative exercise as it involves disagreement, repair and agreement among other things. Many language learners feel self-conscious and negative about their pronunciation. To effectively deal with this question in the class and enable learners to see an improvement is invariably a great psychological boost.

Both vary as teachers; we are often not the best judges of the accuracy of our students' pronunciation. We are accustomed to it and usually very tolerant when in general, native speakers are not. Such exercises help us to be more aware of real problems; learners have in their oral production and to help to correct them. Such activities should be an integral part of any language teaching programme as they make pronunciation an active element of the learning process and focus learners on the language they are producing.

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