

Pronunciation of students can be a challenge for ELT: Suggestions for improvement

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Abstract:

The Importance of English language cannot be over emphasized. English speaking is a pre requisite of success in the world today. Many of us are studying English from the beginning at the school level and are comfortable in it. But still it is observed that non-native English speakers show from the beginning that they lack proficiency of speaking fluently and with correct pronunciation. Every country has made some or the other words so peculiar that English is taking new colours day by day. Till now we have two variants but they get new shades as time passes by. The present paper is a study of pronunciation, its problems and some good suggestions are also recommended. The paper also focuses on writer's meeting and learning experience with Pron chart maestro.

Keywords:

Pronchart; Neurophysiology; Muscles; Accents; Phonetic

Pronunciation is the biggest thing which is noticed by others when you speak with them. So, it has to be clear, pleasant and appropriate. Let me start with an anecdote:

Teacher entered in the class, wishes students and as soon as he started speaking just introductory sentences, students make their mind about his capability of speaking. If he ask any question and students answer in broken English he made his mind that they can't speak proper English.

As,

Teacher: What is the currency of US?

Student: Dollar \$

(His 'o')

did not give a sound as it has to....

So he understood that student has a local effect of speaking English.

Introduction

Literature has its sublimity whereas language as a responsibility. Language teaching is not only for teaching, learning or passing the examination but

for communicative purpose. I have observed a wall among language and literature teachers over importance of literature and language. Discussing top notch authors in classrooms is a different thing but using grammatically correct English and speaking flawless and fluent English is a challenge for non-native English speaker. Students who discuss Derrida with their teachers in classroom cannot use English for communicative purpose. This really makes ELT and his situation embarrassing.

Language Teaching

Language teaching is really an art which need constant practice both in speaking and writing. And the most important part is, speaking has to be apt and appropriate. Pronunciation is integral part of language teaching. Normally pronunciation is learned through dictionaries or by practice. Dictionaries provide phonetic symbol which give directions for speaking. It is important to learn the sounds to become comfortable in pronouncing new words. But what the most disgusting part is, we have no subtle science or formulae of pronunciation. By now, normally what we non-native English speaking Teachers do, we make our students learn English on the basis of FLL. As first language or Mother tongue is learned by

practices and through listening only, second language can't be learned like that. My recent visit and learning experience at Oxford University give a life time experience about language learning. There I meet Adrian Underhill, the man behind Macmillan Pron Chart. I underwent a short term workshop where I learned the intricacies of Pronunciation. To him, it is not a matter of tongue and practice but it is a physical exercise which can be easily learnt with the muscular movements. To him, pronunciation can be understood with Neurophysiology meaning knowing which muscles are moving where in your body and what they are doing actually. Pronunciation cannot be learnt by repetition but by practice only. We have to see and monitor every muscular movement and notice where and how they move? what sound actually they produce. Only that movement can tell exact pronunciation. And that practice has to start right from the beginning only. Other wise second language always start creeping on first language. To change MT effect from any person we must start exercising muscular movements not actually repetition of words.

Pronunciation and Physical Movements

Adrian Underhill and his phonemic chart is the thing which I always find some charismatic effect and admire a lot. I always want to be familiar with it. But I have never dreamt that I will get an opportunity to learn his chart by him directly. So when I get this pleasure I became really on the top of the world. He made pronunciation not a matter of practice but a physical moment which can be audible and visible to all. This approach is never ever understood by anyone and it really helped a lot to make me understand my students and target group and their real hindrances. He explained that sounds are physically produced and we can distinguish them with our movements. Pronunciation can only be understood, checked and taught as physical aspect of language. Every language has three aspects:-

- Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Pronunciation

Pronunciation provides volume, body and shape to language. Language learner can better understand language if they see movements of Tongue, Muscles and Jaw. They produce sound collectively. When they will come to know how to use their muscles to produce sound, they will learn correct pronunciation. We learn our FL at a very young age and our movements of muscles work on that, but

SL come to us by the passing of time, we don't try to work on our muscles according to the need of second language, as a result we try to move muscles in the FL as they are automatized in our body and we lack in pronunciation. Adrian suggests we can help learners to reconnect with muscles used for speaking English. The use of Muscles, Tongue, and Jaw will better manipulate the sounds. His chart is really wonderful. By using it and moving with the help of it will make learners aware of the movements of Tongue, lips, Jaws and finally voice.

English and Pronunciation

English pronunciation is unpredictable. It need a lot of efforts to put when a person learn English. In native language or MT we have only few sounds which come naturally by birth. But in English we use different sounds. One has to recognise; teach and learn and pronounce them to know English as pronunciation is the biggest thing which is noticed while speaking and the other person judged about your English by way of speaking. English pronunciation has 3 levels:-

- People don't understand what the speaker is saying,
- People understand but with concentration and

- People understand as pronunciation is clear and pleasant.

There are two widely understood accents which are spoken American (Gen.Am) and British. They are used all over the world and people across the borders understand them. Although, it is observed that some Regional or Native accent become prominent in pronunciation but Non-native English speaking is less tolerant. Speaking English with Indian, Chinese or German Effect may lose its beauty and make situation not easy to understand. Using blended effect in pronunciation lost the beauty of the language.

Factors affecting the learning of Pronunciation:

In Indian circumstances recent discussion research and teachings reveal that issues which effect pronunciation are:-

- Importance of accent
 - Stress
 - Intonation
 - Rhythm
 - Comprehensibility of the speech of non-native speakers.
 - An accent is the first thing which actually reveals the identity of the person. Non-native speakers try to convert SL according to the sounds of their FL.
- Language has been classified as stress and syllable timed. Some languages are syllable timed as English and German. Some other are stressed timed. In syllable timed language, all syllables are equally stressed. Vowels are not reduced. The distinction between stress and syllable based language is important especially in English. So, the most important factor is to know about the first language of the learned and to know if it is stress based or syllable based.
 - If we apply it in the case of India and Indian languages, we will come to know that they are primarily syllable timed languages. Recent studies tell us that if we combine both we can get the accuracy of pronunciation. O'Brian (2004) reported the importance of all these above mentioned issues of pronunciation. Listening is a very important feature to check pronunciation activities. Focus of stress and recognising stress is also very good exercise.

I teach English at Undergraduate level. Pronunciation to me a great hindrance which not only stop fluency of speaking but writing and vocabulary

enhancement is also effected. The very first problem which we face is students coming from semi urban background have problem of speaking |l| or |r|. They can't pronounce |r| sound. It looks as it's a contagious disease as 90% students speak literature like "litleture". They completely change the word, and its spelling. When I visited Oxford and met Adrian, I discussed this problem with him. He told me that I have to work on the movements of tongue and tell my students where they have to take their tongue and what they have to move, where they have to give stress etc. I learned it with him, make a video and reproduce it with my students. Some student really showed great concern and wonderful results come out.

Pronunciation can only be taught in a better way with the help of introducing International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). It is a system which is used to transcribe word with their sounds. It is done by utilizing universal symbols to represent the spoken language. Most dictionaries used it. The teachers can introduce them in three ways:-

- To memorize the chart
- To show IPA chart for the sounds of vowel.
- To learn the chart with symbols.

The use of schwa is very important. It is the most common vowel sound in English which were and remain in every third word. It comes with all 5 vowels. In India 'schwa' sound is not taught properly, so there always remain corrections of pronunciation. In every country pronunciation difficulties are different. So, when applying IPA system, we have to keep in mind about the nationality and problems of that country. Actually schwa is overlooked because it has no role in written language but it has a deep role to play when we talk about spoken language. Since many vowels are reduced to Schwa it has become the most commonly used vowel sound in spoken English.

Advice for students to check their Pronunciation

Students confess in front of Teachers that they want to improve their pronunciation because it put them in some embarrassing moments some time. And above all, they are unable to learn, read and write correct English as some times they misspelled the words. There are some practices students can follow as good suggestions.

- Listen to spoken English as much as possible such as T.V.,

Internet, and look at their facial movements when they pronounce specific words, phrases and try to imitate them.

- English phonemic page is very important to learn as it guides about pronouncing words. It is easily available in dictionaries.
- Whenever students listen or read some new words, always learn its pronunciation with the help of syllabus pattern.
- Find out your problem areas, discuss with teachers, research on them and try to improve us some words have some problems in Native languages such as French feel difficulty is 'th', Arabic with 'p' to 'b', Hindi speaking 'r' to 'l'.
- Practice the sounds of words in pairs for find difficult, as 'b' 'p', 'r' 'l' to improve.
- Never speak in hurry. If Non-nativespeaks too quickly, they skip sounds as a result their pronunciation will not remain flawless.

Native or first language pronunciation sometimes overlaps on SLL. This in particular happens with English. English is popular all over the globe but when non-native speaks, thing are recognised by way of speaking.

Anyone who speaks another language find it difficult to produce some sounds which are either not used in FL or used differently. So, many countries find it difficult to speak English even if they can read it. Spoken English is sometimes different what we write. English pronunciation has someflexibility. There are two aspects: One, there remain shadows of FL in English speaking. Secondly, don't try to imitate native speaker but try to be comfortable and correct in pronunciation. The SLL should not speak like native speaker but should speak correct words.

Some dos and Don'ts of Pronunciation when teaching to Non- native speakers

- Never repite or imitate sounds.
- Teach sounds separately not with words.
- Break the word when introducing first time and then ask them to speak and correct their mistakes.
- Take help of Audio visuals also.
- Ask them to repeat within their mind.
- Introduce Pronunciation charts (American and British both to make them familiar with correct pronunciation)

- Never encourage them to speak as they are because that always gives a new Pronunciation.
- Language is for learning properly and speaking correctly. Vocabulary, Grammar and construction can be learned at any stage as they need cognitive and mental exercise but Pronunciation is Physical exercise and need patience to learn.
- We have British chart, American chart and SAMPA chart which are really very helpful.

To sum up , I can say that pronunciation is not for cramming or teaching verbatim but it's a feel which only can be understood by students when we teachers motivate them and give them a chance to bloom.

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