

THE DIFFICULTIES WITH THE PRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIA

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Abstract:

English has to play an important role as an associate official language; as an associate medium of higher education; as a library language; and so on. In the present age of globalization, English is the only lingua-franca for the entire world. In Countries like India, a mere knowledge of English is regarded as an **index of educatedness**. Of late, people go on **International Tours** and participate in **International Seminars** and **Conferences** than ever before. After completion of their Graduation / Post Graduation in their respective subjects, most of the Indians are very much eager to go abroad to make more money or attain much fame. But, we see many people who went abroad with high spirits and great expectations, are coming back within a short period of time instead of settling down there. There is a wide gap between the levels of competence in English required by the people going abroad with an aim of settling down there and the one that they actually possess in terms of communication. Non-native speakers of English may not understand the accent of the native speakers of English. Of course, this problem is vice versa.

In English there exists no single form of pronunciation. The letters in English Alphabet do not always indicate the same sounds in pronunciation. The 26 letters of English Alphabet do not always indicate the same sounds in pronunciation. English spelling does not always indicate how an English word should be pronounced. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the letters of English Alphabet and the sounds in English. The letters in English Alphabet are inadequate to represent the pronunciation of English words unambiguously.

Key Words:

official language - medium of higher education - library language - first language - second language - Globalization - lingua-franca - foreign language - English language teaching - vocabulary - differences in culture - mother tongue - phonology - accent - native speakers - American English - British English - British RP - Non-native speakers - sound - listening and speaking skills - pronunciation.

Introduction:

We are aware of the importance of English in the everyday affairs of the modern world. In countries like India, English has to play an important role as an associate official language; as an associate medium of higher education; as a library language; and so on. In countries like India English is used only as a **Second Language**. However, even in such Countries, it is extensively used in the fields of **Trade and Commerce; Travel and Tourism, Banking; Administration; Aviation; Law** and above all; **Education**. Now, with the advent of **GLOBALIZATION** and revolution in **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**, the importance of this language has further increased. Even after the end of British rule in India, the importance of English has only gone up – not gone down. In Countries like India, a mere knowledge of English is regarded as an **index of educatedness**. Of late, people go on **International Tours** and participate in **International Seminars and Conferences** than ever before. Of late, most of the Indians, after completion of their Graduation / Post Graduation in their respective subjects, are very much eager to go abroad to make more money or attain much fame. As a matter of fact, they are very good at their concerned subjects or fields.

But, in spite of their expertise, we see many people who went abroad with high spirits and great expectations, are coming back within a short period of time instead of settling down there. Having faced problems in terms of communication, especially in their “accent”, they came back. As they are non-native speakers of English, they may not understand the accent of the native speakers of English. Of course, this problem is vice versa. One of the prime reasons for this may be their “accent”. The importance of pronunciation in communication cannot be denied. In fact it is as important as grammar and vocabulary. It is a well known fact that there is a wide gap between the levels of competence in English required by the people going abroad with an aim of settling down there and the one that they actually possess in terms of communication.

In the present age of globalization, English is the only lingua-franca for the entire world. But students and teachers of English face numerous problems related to the study and teaching of the English language. Initially the English language enjoyed the status of the first language. Then its status was changed into that of a second language used for official work throughout the country. Then it was demoted to the position of an optional second language. The learning of English as a second language is a difficult task for both the teachers and the learners. Even the linguists have different opinions about the English language teaching. Some scholars say that mastering its vocabulary is the real difficulty of learning the English language. Some others say that mastering the sound system and the structure of the language is the real problem of learning the English language. The problem is further complicated by differences in culture between mother tongue and English language. According to Rejendra Sing, “Mother tongue is not just a verbal pile. It is a psychology, an environment, a source of cultural and cognitive sustenance, an emotion, a bond and many collateral things”.

To attempt to guard against its interference is an act of violence with a pernicious potential to damage some vital nerves of the emotional-cultural artistic continuum of a learners personality. Mulk Raj

Anand, in a seminar, said, “We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can write only as Indians”. The mother tongue of a student learning English as second language is bound to have different phonology. And their English is much more affected by their regional accent and it is rather difficult to avoid the pull of one’s mother tongue standing in the way of correct pronunciation of English. In order to give effective teaching the teacher must have a good knowledge of mother tongue (first language) - and the second language English - and the differences between the two. English, as it is internationally spoken, has more than one accent. English has two standard models: American English and British English. Apart from these two standard models, English has native speakers in Canada, Australia, Newzealand and South Africa. But British RP (Received Pronunciation) still enjoys world-wide recognition. In India we may have English speakers from all the states. Some speakers (Bengali and Bihari), for instance, pronounce /v/ instead of /b/ and /b/ instead of /v/. Instead of ‘Rayindra’ they pronounce ‘Rabindra’ and instead of ‘brindavan’, ‘vrindavan’. Some speakers (U. P., M. P.) pronounce /s/ instead of /ʃ/. They pronounce ‘Shobha’ as ‘Sobha’. Some of the Telugu speakers pronounce /ʃ/ instead of /s/. They pronounce “Asok” (/s/) as “Ashok” (/ʃ/); “Santhi” (/s/) as “Shanthi” (/ʃ/) and “Syam” (/s/) as “Shyam” (/ʃ/) ---. Assamese may pronounce the word, ‘examination’ as “/ɪgzæmɪneɪʃən/” instead of “/ɪgzæmɪneɪfən/”; ‘ocean’ “/əʊʃən/” as “/əʊsən/”; ‘invigilation’ “/ɪnvɪʃɪleɪfən/” as “/ɪnvɪʃɪleɪsən/” ----. It is clear that it is neither possible nor necessary for everyone to get mastery over the British RP (Received Pronunciation). But to aim at international intelligibility, approximation to the above standard can be tried out. The *mother tongue influence* on English is very obvious in the above instances. This manifests in the form of incorrect pronunciation.

Problems with the Pronunciation of English:

In English there exists no single form of pronunciation, which alone could be regarded as the correct pronunciation. The reason is that the letters in English Alphabet that are useful for us in writing do not always indicate the same sounds in pronunciation. We know the English Alphabet has 26 letters but there are 44 sounds. These 26 letters do not always indicate the same sounds in pronunciation. English spelling does not always indicate how an English word should be pronounced. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the letters of English Alphabet and the sounds in English. The letters in English Alphabet are inadequate to represent the pronunciation of English words unambiguously.

As this language is spoken very widely, it has developed many a good spoken form which are called “accents”. All these accents are correct, acceptable and even respectable forms of pronunciation in the areas or regions or countries where they are in use. They are the accents used by the well educated people there.

While learning to speak in English, the non-native speakers may face some problems. Pronunciation is one of them. Here are some factors which are responsible for the problems in pronunciation of English.

1. Impact of mother tongue: --

Problems of pronunciation may arise in mapping the sound system of our mother tongue on to that of English. In fact, the two are different systems. Because of the mapping, we fail to perceive the differences. Non-native speakers of English often perceive and produce sounds of English like the sounds of their own mother tongue, though they are not quite the same. It is difficult for them to pronounce some English sounds because, they do not exist in their mother tongue.

Eg :-- i) The first sound of the English word, “teacher” is not the first sound of some languages. The first sound of the English word, “teacher” is not the first sound of the Telugu word / Hindi word, “tomato” / “tomator”..

ii) The sound /z/ in the English word, “zoo” does not exist in some languages like Hindi or Telugu today.

iii) Words like “bag” pronounced as /bæg/--- in English are not possible to write exactly in Telugu because there is no corresponding sound for /æ/ in Telugu.

iv) The combination of the first two or three consonants in the words, “sketch”; “starve”; “school”; “stream” are very difficult to pronounce for many people.

2. Neglect of listening and speaking skills: --

Almost total neglect of listening and speaking skills is another factor for the problems of pronunciation of English. The recent theories of Second Language teaching learning have laid stress on the importance of the listening and speaking skills. But for a long time, English language teaching in India has focused on the Reading and Writing Skills to the exclusion of the ‘oral and aural’ skills.

3. Inadequate training: --

The syllabi and text books in the level at which English should be introduced and the skills that are to be focused on are frequently going on changing. Particularly the teachers require to teach the frequently and hastily changing text books. They are inadequately trained to teach pronunciation. Many a time trained teachers are not available at all. The teacher should be a model for correct speaking in class. The learners are expected to be introduced to the pronunciation of words in English by their teacher during the day-to-day interaction. It is when the teacher her/himself has coloured pronunciation that the learners are unable to acquire correct skills in spoken English. The pronunciation samples they are exposed to in their

classroom environment being inappropriate, the learners are most likely to adopt a similar pronunciation skill.

4. The casual attitude of educators: --

This problem is further compounded by the casual attitude of educators themselves towards pronunciation teaching and learning. Several arguments are in favour of the exclusion of pronunciation teaching as a language teaching component. The chief argument is that Indian pronunciation is good enough for effective communication.

5. Relation between sound and spelling: --

The relation between sound and spelling causes considerable difficulty to the learner in acquiring correct pronunciation. English spelling does not always indicate how an English word should be pronounced. English has 44 sounds but the alphabet has only 26 letters. And there is no one-to-one correspondence between the letters of alphabet and the sounds of English. This results in a good deal of confusion.

Let's observe some instances:

A) The same letter(s) stand(s) for many different sounds as '—

i) The letter "a" stands for different sounds in the words '—

mat /mæt/ woman /wʊmən/

water /wɔ:tə/ late /leit/

last /lɑ:st/ village /vɪlɪdʒ/

ii) The letters "ough" stand for different sounds in the following words:

bough /baʊ/ cough /kɔf/

through /θru:/ thought /θɔ:t/

iii) The letters "ch" stand for different sounds in the following words:

chief /tʃi:f/ monarch /mɔnək/

machine /məʃi:n/

iv) The letter "s" stands for different sounds in the words '—

same /seɪm/ sugar /ʃʊgə/ music /mju:zik/

vision /vɪʒə n/

B) The same sound is represented by different letters or combination of letters as ' –

i) The sound /n/ is represented by “n”; “nn”; “pn”; “kn”; “gn” as in the words:

nut /nʌt/

funnny /fʌn/

know /nəʊ/

pneumonia /nju:məʊniə/

sign /saɪn/

ii) The vowel sound /e/ in the word, ‘get’ is represented by “a”; “e”; “u”; “ai”; “ea”; “ei”; “eo”; “ie”; “ue” as in the words:

many /meni/

end /end/

bury /beri/

said /sed/

head /hed/

leisure /leɪʒə/

leopard /lepəd/

friend /frend/

guess /ges/

iii) The vowel sound /i:/ in the word, ‘tea’ is represented by the letters “i”; “e”; “ey”; “ie”; “ea”; “ee”; “ei”; “oe”; “uay” as in the words:

heat /hi:t/

foetus /fi:təs/

quay /ki:/

key /ki:/

people /pi:pl/

grief /gri:f/

keen /ki:n/

receive /ri:si:v/

scene /si:n/

machine /məʃi:n/

C) One letter of the alphabet stands for a sequence of two sounds as '—

i) The letter “q” stands for a combination of /k/ as in ‘key’ and /w/ as in ‘watch’ in the following words:

quite /kwɑɪt/

quiet /kwɑɪət/

queer /kwɪə/

question /kwɛstʃən/

squash /skwɔʃ/

square /skweə/

ii) The letter “x” stands for a sequence of /k/ as in ‘kite’ and /s/ as in ‘sea’ in the following words:

box /bɔks/

excuse /ɛkskju:s/

excite /ɛksɑɪt/

exercise /ɛksəsaɪz/

excise /ɛksɑɪz/

excess /ɛkses/

- iii) The letter “x” also stands for a sequence of /g/ as in ‘go’ and /z/ as in ‘zoo’ in the following words:

exact /egzækt/ exist /egzɪst/

examine /ɪgzæmɪn/

- iv) The letter “u” sometimes stands for the sequence of a consonant followed by a vowel as in the following words:

use /ju:z/ unit /ju:nɪt/ utilize /ju:tɪlaɪz/

- D) There is difference between sounds and spelling. The number of letters and the number of sounds in an English word may not be equal.

Eg: word	No. of letters	No. of sounds
Call	4	3
Colony	6	6
Seize	5	3
Relax	5	6
Knowledge	9	5
Follow	6	4
Reign	5	3
College	7	5
Bright	6	4
Receive	7	5

Remedial Steps and Conclusion:

If English, which is being used as the second language, is introduced to the learners before puberty, the chances of attaining a native-like pronunciation skill is easier. The teacher should be a model for correct speaking in class and the learners are expected to be introduced to the pronunciation of words in English by their teacher during the day-to-day interaction. It is when the teacher her/himself has coloured pronunciation that the learners are unable to acquire correct skills in spoken English. Spoken English be encouraged and promoted and the sound patterns which are likely to be confused and faltered be identified and drilled. The learners should be able to practise these sound patterns over and over again using a model voice to emulate. These activities are expected to be done in digital language labs. Then they not only help

eliminate the mother tongue influence, but also hasten the acquisition of the target language. *Digital language labs* equipped with this facility allow learners to listen to correct pronunciation of a word and the check their own learning during the practice session. Learners of **English as a Second language** have an undeniable need for new and varied vocabulary. Increasing the need and opportunity for the learners to communicate in English is a sure shot strategy to enhance their proficiency in the language.

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