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LEARNING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATIONS WITH THE HELP OF SMARTPHONE

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Abstract: English pronunciation has been the topic of discussion in academia for a long time. It has been extensively discussed because there is no logical arrangement between spelling and the sounds represented by them. For example, 'ch' in 'chemistry' is pronounced /k/ and 'ch' 'chest' is pronounced as /tʃ/. Similarly, 'u' in the word 'put' is pronounced as /u/ and 'u' in the word 'cut' is pronounced as /ʌ/. There are many examples in English where spellings and sounds do not relate to each other. Therefore, learning English pronunciations is a different skill. It has to be learnt like a separate language skill.

It has been often seen that the teachers and the students tend to pronounce many words wrongly. It is because they think that there is logic between spelling and pronunciation. However, the same logic cannot be applied to all the words in English. Teaching pronunciation to Indian students had been a serious problem in most of the schools and colleges, especially, in rural areas. Many teachers mispronounce the words, phrases and sentences leading to miscommunication.

Teachers and the students had to rely on the dictionary to know the actual pronunciation of a word. Understanding dictionary pronunciation demands the knowledge of IPA symbols. Smartphone can be a very helpful in learning English pronunciations. It can be used in many ways to understand the pronunciation of the words in isolation as well as in connected speech.

This research paper explores the ways in which smartphone can be used in teaching and learning English pronunciations and also tries to bring out the significance of using smartphone in teaching / learning English pronunciations.

Index Terms - smartphone, pronunciation, spellings, sounds, symbols, letters.

It is an established truth that language learning, unlike learning other subjects, is more complicated and time consuming process. The task becomes more difficult when it comes to learning a foreign language or a second language. Though English is regarded as the second language in India, it is like a foreign language to majority of the Indian people especially, to those people who reside in rural areas. As it is not the language of daily communication, it can't be acquired naturally as the mother tongue is acquired. Special efforts are required in order to learn English language.

English language has two forms namely, spoken form and written form. It is said that "language is primarily spoken and then written". Therefore, the experts and linguists suggest that language should be taught in the natural order of skill acquisition i. e. LSRW. Listening facilitates speaking and reading facilitates writing. It is also true that all the skills are interdependent. Each of these skills partially helps in enhancing other skills. One needs to have the knowledge of pronunciation of the words while speaking. If the words are not pronounced correctly, the possibility of miscommunication or failure of communication

increases. Therefore, it is important to pronounce words properly. In the modern times language is viewed as the means of communication. Therefore, spoken language has gained greater importance. Teaching proper pronunciation becomes very important in this case.

According to Cambridge English dictionary, pronunciation is “The way in which a word or letter is said, or said correctly, or the way in which a language is spoken” [1]. English pronunciations need to be learnt differently because there are plenty of irregularities leading to the difference in spellings and pronunciation. For example, ‘ch’ in ‘chemistry’ is pronounced /k/ and ‘ch’ ‘chest’ is pronounced as /tʃ/; ‘u’ in the word ‘put’ is pronounced as /u/ and ‘u’ in the word ‘cut’ is pronounced as /ʌ/; /k/ in the word ‘kite’ is pronounced and /k/ in the word ‘know’ is silent; /p/ in the word ‘place’ is pronounced and /p/ in the word ‘psalm’ is silent; the spellings ‘knight’ and ‘night’ has same pronunciation; the words ‘seen’ and ‘scene’ have same pronunciation and so on. Therefore, it is very important to teach English pronunciations carefully. Non- native speakers face many problems in pronouncing English words. It is seen that different people pronounce same word differently. One way to understand the actual pronunciation of the word is to refer to the traditional dictionary. However, understanding pronunciations from the traditional dictionary requires the knowledge of IPA symbols because the standard received pronunciations of the words are written using IPA symbols in the traditional dictionaries.

Smartphone is a very good and effective option for teaching and learning English vocabulary. The exact pronunciation (RP) of a word can be seen as well as heard with the help of smartphone. Smartphone is being used by majority of the people today. Its use depends on the necessity and interest of the user. Besides making and receiving phone calls, smartphone is used for sending and receiving text messages and electronic mails, and also for chatting on different social media platforms. It is a mobile phone, according to Oxford Language Dictionary, “that performs many of the functions of a computer, typically having a touch screen interface, internet access, and operating system capable of running downloaded apps” [2]. Smartphone can be used as a simple phone as well as a mini computer. It has all the computing functions. It comes with strong hardware, powerful operating system and many inbuilt software applications. According to Christensson Per -

A smartphone is a mobile phone that includes advanced functionality beyond making phone calls and sending text messages. Most smartphones have the capability to display photos, play videos, check and send e-mail, and surf the Web. Modern smartphones, such as the iPhone and Android based phones can run third-party applications, which provides limitless functionality. [3]

Smartphones have been extensively used by people. They are used for learning different things including languages. It can be used for teaching /learning vocabulary, spellings, grammar, writing, reading, listening, speaking and pronunciation. Watching videos at “TED”, “Lyrics Training”, “BBC Learning English”, “British Council Teaching English” and “Talk English” naturally help in improving pronunciation of the learners. Teachers can advise their students to visit such websites and listen to the videos. These can be easily accessed on the smartphones with internet connectivity. Speak English with Vanessa”, “English with Lucy”, “Rachael’s English” “Jennifer ESL” are the special YouTube channels with plenty of videos. Listening to these videos can definitely help in improving the pronunciations. The videos are prepared by the native English speakers on these channels. This gives an opportunity to learners to listen to the native speakers of English. They are specially meant for the learners who want to learn correct pronunciations. “Worldwide Speak”, “English Anyone”, and so are also dedicated to English language learners. The videos on these channels are one click away from the smartphone users.

It is also thought that the best way to learn vocabulary is to use the dictionary. Traditional dictionaries are useful in building vocabulary but it is difficult to know the exact pronunciation of the word from the traditional dictionary. All the people do not have the knowledge of the IPA symbols. This difficulty can be easily overcome with the help of smartphone. Operating system of the smartphone allows multiple software applications to be downloaded and installed. As many dictionaries as one wants can be installed on the smartphone. Digital dictionaries come with written pronunciation as well as the oral pronunciation of the word. Some of the dictionaries give British English pronunciation as well as American English pronunciation of the words. These dictionaries are easy to use and more effective than the traditional dictionaries. The user just needs to touch the sound symbol to listen to the exact pronunciation of the word. “The use of smartphone is very effective technique in building vocabulary for Chinese university EFL students”. [4]

English is a stressed timed language. Its rhythm is heard when it is spoken with the proper accent. It is difficult to find the teacher who can speak English with proper accent and intonation. General Indian English speakers tend to produce words and not the chunks. To become a fluent English speaker one needs to understand the weak form of the function words. Not all the teachers can speak English with proper accent and intonation. The smartphone can be of great help in this case. The proper accent and the intonation can be understood by visiting the site like “BBC Learning English”. These websites give proper practice and training of the correct pronunciation. It is done according to the level of the learner. Smartphone proves to be of great use in such cases. The learner has to visit the website and click the required options.

There are software applications like ‘voice aloud reader’ which come with the various facilities like – British English, American English, male as well as female voice, increasing or decreasing the pitch, changing the speed of reading and so on. User can choose according to his or her preference and level of understanding. There are plenty of audio-books available on internet. Users can download these audio-books on the smartphones and listen to them whenever they want. The Google assistance also does the work of reading for the smartphone users. This helps in improving the accent in general and the pronunciation in particular of the listener.

Smartphones come with operating systems that interact with the user. Users can directly talk to the operating system of the smartphone. This is an entertaining as well as instructing exercise. The user can listen to the accent and try to imitate. Besides, there are several websites and software applications that give practice of fluent and native like English speaking. There are facilities of shifting to the different dialects and international varieties of English. Users can choose their level and practice spoken English in order to improve their pronunciations and accent.

The benefits of using smartphone are limitless. The opportunities of learning are provided irrespective of the time and place. There is no limit to learning. One can learn whatever one wants. In case of learning pronunciations of the difficult words, one does not need to wait for the teacher. Smartphones offer more appropriate pronunciation than the teacher. It offers the best pronunciation of the word i.e. received pronunciation. Smartphone is useful in learning many things but it can also make the person addict. It is good, if it is used for educational purpose but its excessive use is found to be harmful for human eyes and brain. Therefore it should be used carefully. According to Nuhi Bllaca -

Using Smartphone and other mobile learning technologies one can benefit a lot, as they offer language learning opportunities everywhere, and this is due to their portal and connectivity ability. However, if they are used out of control or outside of standards and not in compliance with learning objectives they can do more harm than good to our educational purpose. [5]

A coin always has two sides. Smartphone and its use is not an exception to this rule. Using smartphone offers multiple advantages but using it for the purpose of mere entertainment is addictive and can be really dangerous. It can harm the eyes and brain of the user. Therefore, it is advised that it should be used judiciously. None can say that it is not a good learning assistance, if it is used properly. The benefits of using smartphone in teaching and learning English are infinite. It is useful for the students as well as for the teachers. Teachers can seek assistance whenever there is a doubt. They can also tell their students to use smartphones properly in order to learn language.

The use of smartphone increases in multiples when it comes to teaching and learning English pronunciations. Received Pronunciations can be learnt with the help of smartphones. They give us the opportunity to listen to British speakers and American speakers. The accent can be improved by listening to the native speakers of English. Smartphone provides the users with ample opportunities of listening to native speakers. Besides, the smartphone is the device that can be carried by a person all the time. It saves the time and gives exact information to the user. Therefore, smartphone is a great help in teaching and learning English language in general and English pronunciation in particular.

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