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A STUDY ON IMPROVING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS AMONG UNDER GRADUATE STUDENTS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract:

Spoken language is used more than written language in our daily life. English is spoken differently in countries where it is the first language. Hence, Received Pronunciation is chosen as a model in non English speaking countries. Pronunciation plays an important role in improving communication skills. The problem of teaching English in the non native context has become more complex because teaching pronunciation is often neglected in the language teaching. If the learner's general aim is to speak intelligibly in English, his/her attempt should be to acquire some skills in pronunciation.

This study is intended to study mother tongue impact on students and how they can cope up with mother tongue and material provided to the students to improve pronunciation skills. It also intended to study techniques, methods and approaches taken to improve pronunciation skills among the students. The use of technology has become an important part of the learning process in and out of the classroom. It enables learners to adapt class room activities for improving pronunciation. It also presents the importance of innovative trends and methods that are being used particularly in improving pronunciation.

Key words: communication skills, methods, approaches, materials, mother tongue impact.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of communication in everyday life. The ability of speaking English embodies the correctness of pronunciation and intonation and directly affects the appropriate communication in conversation. The way in which a word is pronounced is an important element in learning a foreign language.

Natural acquisition of English language is lacking as it is rarely used outside of the class room. *The limited number of classes allotted for English speaking and pronunciation and lack of resources make it more challenging.* Due to mother tongue the learner may not be able to pronounce the words exactly. Teacher is the role model in the class room. Students imitate the teachers' pronunciation to learn English. So, the teacher should be correct in his pronunciation. The teacher must have command over sounds, word accent, rhythm and intonation to teach effectively. Teacher need to know the facts about pronunciation understand and be able to predict the kinds of problems students might have with the pronunciation. Teacher must know the ways to teach pronunciation, keep lessons practical and include communicative practice. Structured, graded teaching learning material is needed to improve the pronunciation skills. The mastery over the pronunciation is possible through practice.

Basics of Pronunciation:

The sound system, word accent, rhythm and intonation are the elements in teaching learning of pronunciation. The respiratory system, the phonatory system and the articulatory system are needed for the production of spoken language. These three systems with different functions work together as a unified whole to produce speech. Pulmonic air stream mechanism is used to produce English and most Indian sounds.

There is no one to one correspondence between the sounds and the letters of the alphabet. There are 26 letters of the alphabet and these letters represent 44 sounds in the Received Pronunciation. These symbols are known as the International Phonetic Alphabet. The IPA symbols can be used to transcribe the sounds of any language.

Teacher effectiveness does not depend on being a native English speaker. It depends primarily on the professionalism of the teacher such as pedagogical expertise, meta linguistic knowledge, and interpersonal skills.

Pronunciation instruction tends to be linked to the instructional method being used. In the grammar-translation method of the past, pronunciation was almost irrelevant and therefore seldom taught. In the audio-lingual method, learners spent hours in the language lab listening to and repeating sounds and sound combinations. It became popular in the 1950s. This involved a systematic presentation of the structures of the second language, moving from the simple to the more complex. This approach was strongly influenced by a belief using a lot of practice mechanically and repeatedly. Instruction of Pronunciation is addressed with the context of real communication.

Factors Influencing Pronunciation:

There are several factors influencing the pronunciation of English:

- ❖ Most researchers agree that the learner's first language influences of the target language and is a significant factor in accounting for foreign accents. Inference from the first language is likely because errors in aspirations, stress and intonation in the target language Learners make mistakes in the stress of words and rhythm of sentence, unlike many other languages English requires one syllable in each word be stressed more than others. The importance of putting the stress on the right syllable in English words cannot be underestimated and putting the stress on the wrong syllable is more likely to make a word unintelligible than is mispronouncing one of its sounds. *"Incorrect English pronunciations also happened due to the effect of the mother tongue, although pronunciation errors may also be due to other issues. The ESL students felt uncomfortable and unconfident in the process of speaking English and felt embarrassed for making errors and mistakes in the second language."*²
- ❖ Intonation, the rises and falls in tone that make the tune of an utterance, is an important aspect of pronunciation of English. Intonation patterns in English sentences primarily indicate the degree of certainty of an utterance whether is a statement, questions or suggestion.
- ❖ Children seem to pick up accents very quickly and the ability to do seems to diminish with age and the knowledge of their native language to a large extent acts as an annoying interference while to their second language learning. Younger learners are able to learn the sound system more effectively, while the learning process of adult learners may be more likely to be hindered because of their age.
- ❖ Attitude towards the target language learning can influence achievement in pronunciation. It is the way an individual pronunciation has much to do with his or her personality and psychological or emotional state at a given time. . *"The learners said they would like to sound native-like, but they do not see pronunciation as important for their personal lives, in which they use English a minimal amount. They live their home and social lives largely in their L1s not in their L2, and thus pronunciation is an optional skill for them outside of their professions."*³
- ❖ Prior experiences with pronunciation instruction may influence learners' success with current efforts. Learners at higher language proficiency levels may have developed habitual, systematic pronunciation errors that must be identified. So learners must have a good habit of learning correct pronunciation at the beginning

Methodologies and Material to improve pronunciation skills among under graduate students:

- ✓ Listen: Listening to examples of authentic speech is the most important way to improve the pronunciation of the students. Shadowing means listening to a short sentence or phrase and then repeating it afterwards trying to imitate the sounds, intonation and word stress and noticing how your mouth and tongue move when you speak. Realizing the importance of pronunciation, English Language Labs were established in the Govt. Degree Colleges in Andhra Pradesh for the benefit of the students. *“Extensive listening of the audio materials had a great contribution of correct pronunciation of the participants”*⁴
- ✓ Record the students’ pronunciation: after giving shadowing, students are instructed to record speaking. Reading aloud and pronouncing individual words separately. Role Play, JAM Sessions, Class Room Seminars are conducted frequently in the class for improving pronunciation skills. *“Drama techniques are especially efficient as they create a friendly atmosphere where learners feel free to express themselves, thus reducing their affective filter and enhance their self confidence”*⁵
- ✓ Get to know the phonemic chart: It is visual representation of different sounds. All dictionaries have a phonetic transcription of words so that students know how to pronounce them.
- ✓ Students must teach basic notions of where and how sounds are physically produced.
- ✓ Teacher must use well designed teaching aids that explain and illustrate the position of the speech organs to help students produce sounds correctly. Students must be exposed to native speakers’ pronunciation. *“It is advisable that foreign teachers will have a basic knowledge of language and culture in the country where they teach for a better understanding of the students’ background”*⁶
- ✓ A good way to start is to break down words into sounds. Practice each syllable and sound one by one and then go over it again.
- ✓ Visualization: habituate visualization. If student face the difficulty to pronounce, try to picture it.
- ✓ Provide practice of tongue twisters for improving tongue twisters. Learning experience doesn’t have to be so formal and rigid. Start practicing the tongue twisters slowly, then increase speed as you feel more in control

Online Material/Sources:

- English Pro, a free Mobile App for learning English pronunciation, is the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad latest University Social Responsibility initiative. English pro is ideally suited for anyone who has received five years of school education, with English as a curriculum subject. English Pro can be used as a skill enhancement course or can be pursued as a complement course to other skill based courses to enhance students’ employability skills. English Pro can also be used by teachers to support classroom teaching of English in Indian schools. *“EnglishPro can be used as a skill-enhancement course or can be pursued as a complement course to other skill-based courses to enhance your employability skills.”*⁷

Conclusion:

Improving pronunciation skills through various teaching learning methods in the educational institutions have gained momentum realizing the importance of pronunciation in communication skills. Pronunciation, being the sub skill of speaking must be given the top most priority in learning for effective communication. It can be concluded that mastering pronunciation will lead to getting perfection in communication.

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