

Article Final Draft[1].edited (1)last.docx

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Submission date: 23-Apr-2024 08:46AM (UTC-0400)

Submission ID: 2345168639

File name: tmp5q8n7n43 (45.78K)

Word count: 3050

Character count: 15997

Title: Speaking English as English

Address for correspondence

Roja. Akkaraboyina

Assistant Professor, St. Ann's College for Women, Visakhapatnam, AP

Research Scholar, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh

Ph.No – 8341145429

Mail Id - -rojakrishna8@yahoo.in

Abstract

The English language is used globally as a medium of communication by those who do not share the same native language, according to the survey conducted by Braj Kachru in 1985. Nearly 38 crore people considered English as a primary language and, around 26 crore people considered it as a second language. Globally, many people find it difficult to pronounce non-native languages correctly owing to their various linguistic backgrounds. Very few people can master this in a short period.

The English spoken by these non-native people is dominated by their native language, which creates differences in spoken English. Each language has a different accent, and many people often mix that native accent with English, which creates misunderstanding and confusion during communication. The lack of appropriate teaching aids and resources is the primary reason for this. Almost 80% of the population does not know the phonetics of daily used words and ends up using the wrong pronunciation. Hence, to be intelligible, there is a need to gain an understanding of the basics of phonetics. In this context, this paper discusses and proposes various aspects of learning the right pronunciation and the crucial part of the facilitator in this regard.

Key Words: English language, pronunciation, spoken English, language skills, learner inspiration, intonation, coordinator, intelligibility.

Introduction:

In this ever-condensing world of communication, there is a need for intelligibility which is the key aspect of spoken English to avoid miscommunication and transit smooth flow of information. Intelligibility is considered a tool to measure how comprehensible a person's speech is in the given conditions. At this point, it is necessary to take a glance at the language skills, especially the spoken skills. There are four segments of Language skill: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking where, Reading and Writing are observed to be easier to learn, as opposed to Speaking, owing to a variety of reasons that impact the 'right' way of speech. To explicate a little further, written English is more formal than spoken English; there is no relation between sound and letters. For example, the word knife has a 'k' in it, but pronouncing the k does not come into the picture as it is a silent letter. This is why sometimes English is referred to as an irrational language. There are many such words where some letters are retained though they are not pronounced.

It is useful to understand the factors that impact the speaking skills of non-native English speakers. One of the major factors that affect speaking skills is the fact that pronunciation of English varies across different geographical areas with numerous accents, like American, Australian, Indian, and such. In India itself there are hundreds of local languages spoken and each language has its accent which dominates the non-native language English creating an illusion of some other new language being spoken. We just cannot idealize a particular model of English, especially in a place like India. In South Asia, English is just a medium for general communication purposes, so one has adapted the pronunciation accordingly. Also, the tone of the voice or the melody of the speech is different subsequently between languages, and so it is essential for the language way of using the tone. For example, considering the simple word "sorry" one can speak in two different ways, from a higher note to a lower and from a lower note to a higher. In the first case, it shows the right feeling for an apology, and in the second case, it shows just a casual tone. So, here, two different voice tones bring two different attitudes, the wrong usage may sometimes lead to miscommunication.

Listening and its Importance in Pronunciation:

One of the simple methods to learn fundamental communication is by listening. Listening skills are essential as it is impossible to learn any language without listening to it first. Listening is critical, and it is first of the four skills in communication or language learning that initiates the path for the other three skills - speaking, reading, and writing. It is only after repeatedly listening to the sounds one can start speaking. Listening skill awakens the language awareness as it stands primary skill of all the four skills listening accounts for 50% of our communication time. It is purposeful and focused rather than accidental; it requires motivation and effort. The intonation, stress, sound and rhythm of the language can be understood and adopted only through proper listening.

Listening skill plays a vital role in speaking though it is usually neglected by non-native speakers. Finally, the result is that let alone mastering the language, many are struggling to be able to use proper pronunciation. Listening comprehension helps to recognize the sounds in the speech and allows to learn and utter them beautifully. In order to achieve this, there is a need to listen more to the native speakers to access the way to pronounce correctly. There are lots of ways to improve pronunciation: listening to native speakers on different platforms like radio, television, conferences, and seminars. Watching interviews, animated broadcast learning, and listening to audiobooks can give a better comprehension and perfect practice and improve the accuracy of pronunciation as well as speaking ability. With this exposure to language, if one can compare his/her spoken records with the original ones, there are better chances of pronunciation proficiency. Ultimately, if a learner desires to master spoken English on par with native speakers, speaking English as English is vital.

Phonetics and its Play in Pronunciation:

Just by listening to the speaker, we can assume their linguistic roots, whether they are British or American or from another place. That is the role played by pronunciation which is governed by phonetics. To trace back the roots of phonetics in India, the first phonetic study was done during the 6th century BCE by a Hindu scholar Pāṇini where he highlights the articulatory description of voicing, though the work mainly concerns the correlation between vernacular languages spoken and written Vedic texts.

Phonetics is a major branch of linguistics that focuses the categorization and production of speech sounds. Every language has its own phonetics, and some languages like Arabic and Spanish have only one style of pronunciation which renders them easy to learn the right way. Whereas English could be difficult with a lot of discrepancies between spelling and pronunciation. Phonetics deals with two major skills - speaking and listening. How the speaker produces the sound, and how he pronounces it comes under speaking skills, and how the audience understands the accent spoken by the speaker requires proper listening skills. Also, how they produce different types of sounds, with different organs like tongue, throat, lips, etc.

Phonetics has symbolic letters for each alphabet present in English and these are used by phonologists to understand the exact pronunciation of the word. With these phonetic symbols, one can know the way to correct pronunciation. The International Phonetic Association gives the IPA-International Phonetic Alphabet, which is used to represent the correct pronunciation of a word. For instance, the phonetic transcription of the word 'phonetics' is **fə'netiks**.

The English alphabet has 26 letters, and 44 phonetic symbols depict the sounds of the alphabet letters according to their usage. The 44 phonetical sounds help to discriminate words or meanings to one word to another. Numerous letters and combination of letters are considered graphemes are that represent the sounds, and a phoneme is a set of sounds that differentiates word to word in a particular language.

The following is a listing of the two categories of English phonetics: Consonants and Vowels.




Consonants

Consonants contribute more to making English understandable than vowels do as they are more in number. Native English speakers from different dialects have distinct accents, and the differences exist because of different sounds of vowels whereas Consonants are pronounced similarly around the globe. So, when learning phonetics, one must concentrate more on consonants than vowels, because though one is imperfect in vowel sounds the audience would understand.

There are five types of consonant sounds based on the way a sound is produced:

- Friction consonants
- Stop Consonants
- Nasal Consonants
- Lateral Consonants
- Gliding Consonants

Friction Consonants:

Phoneme	IPA symbol	Graphemes	Examples
1	F	f, ff, ph, gh, lf, ft	fall, staff, physics, tough, calf, often
2	H	h, wh	hope, whom
3	S	s, ss, c, sc, ps, st, ce, se	sink, lest, circus, since, psychology, listen, peace,
4	V	v, f, ph, ve	van, off, nephew, give
5	 Z	z, zz, s, ss, x, ze, se	zip, buzz, is, scissors, xylophone, craze
6		s, si, z	treasure, division, azure
7		sh, ce, s, ci, si, ch, sci, ti,	shape, ocean, sugar, facial, mention, machine, mission, conscious, ration
8	Θ	th	think, thick
9	ð	th	father, this

Stop Consonants:

Usually, these are represented in pairs.

IPA symbol	Graphemes	Examples
P	p, pp	pin, puppy
B	b, bb	bug, cabbage
T	t, tt, th, ed	tip, matter, Thomas, ripped
D	d, dd, ed	Dad, add, milled
K	¹ k, c, ch, cc, lk, qu,q(u), ck, x	kite, catch, chemical, occur, walk, biqet quill, black, ox
G	¹ g, gg, gh, gu, gue	gate, egg, ghee, guest, prologue
tʃ	ch, tch, tu, ti, te	chess, catch, nature, question, righteous
dʒ	j, ge, g, dge, di, gg	jewel, genius, gadget, pledge, soldier, exaggerate

Some other usages of consonant sounds are usages of sequences. There are many cases where more than two consonants follow one after another which is known as consonant sequence. As per these sequences, they are categorized into Initial and Final Sequences.

Example: *Scream*- *skri:m* (Initial Sequence) *Eight*- *eɪt* (Final Sequence)

Nasal Consonants:

IPA symbol	Graphemes	Examples
M	² m, mm, mb, mn, lm	many, summary, tomb, autumn, calm
N	n, nn, kn, gn, pn	nine, annual, knock, gnash, pneuma
ŋ	ng, n, ngue	English, ring, sink, tongue

Lateral consonants:

IPA symbol	Graphemes	Examples
L	l, ll	light, sell

Gliding consonants:

IPA symbol	Graphemes	Examples
r	² r, rr, wr, rh	rat, parrot, write, rhythm
w	w, wh, u, o	with, when, quiet, choir
j	y, i, j	you, opinion, hallelujah

Vowels

Different slang and accents⁶ in the English language are raised due to the difference in pronunciation of Vowels. Vowels are pronounced by the voiced air passing through mouth articulators that are with different movements of lips and tongue. The only way to get perfection in vowels is by listening and imitating the words spelled by the professionals.

Vowel sounds are categorized into three types:

- Short vowels
- Long vowels
- Diphthongs

Short Vowels:

Phoneme	IPA symbol	Graphemes	Examples
1	³ E	e, ea, u, ie, ai, a, eo, ei, ae	end, thread, hurry, friend, said, many, leopard, heifer, aesthetic
2	I	i, e, o, u, ui, y, ie	it, England, women, busy, guild, gym, sieve
3	ʊ	a, ho, au, aw, ough	swan, honest, maul, slaw, fought
4	ʊ	⁴ o, oo, u, ou	wolf, took, push, could
5	ʌ	u, o, oo, ou	lug, month, blood, double
6	ə	a, er, i, ar, our, ur	about, ladder, pencil, dollar, honor, augur
7	æ	a, ai, au	cat, plaid, augh

Long vowels:

¹¹ Phoneme	IPA symbol	Graphemes	Examples
1	ɑ:	a	Arm, father
2	i:	² e, ee, ea, y, ey, oe, ie, i, ei, eo, ay	be, see, neat, man y, key, phoenix, brief, receive, people, quay
3	u:	o, oo, ew, ue, u_e, oe, ough, ui, ou	whom, soon, few, flue, flute, shoe, throughout, juice, group
4	ɜ:r	⁴ ir, er, ur, ear, or, our, ir	girl, learn, turn, pearl, sword, journey, birth
5	ɔ:	aw, a, or, oor, ore, oar, our, augh, ar, ough, au	¹⁰ paw, ball, fork, poor, fore, board, four, taught, war, bought, sauce

Diphthongs:

A combination of two vowel sounds in a single syllable,

Phoneme	IPA symbol	Graphemes	Examples
1	eɪ	³ a, ai, eigh, aigh, ay, er, et, ei, au, ea, ey	way, mail, weight, straight, pay, gauge, gate, deal, grey
2	aɪ	⁸ i, y, igh, ie, uy, ye, ai, is, eigh, i_e	hider, fly, light, lie, buy, style, aisle, bison, eight, site
3	ɔɪ	oi, oy, uoy	oil, join, toy, buoy
4	eə ^r	¹ air, are, ear, ere, eir, ayer	chair, dare, pear, where, their, prayer
5	ɪə ^r	ear, eer, ere, ier	year, sneer, sphere, pier
6	ʊə ^r	ure, our	pure, flouriest
7	oʊ	¹ o, oa, o_e, oe, ow, ough, eau,	own, boat, lone, toe, bow, though, bateau
8	aʊ	ow, ou, ough	how, about, plough

Intonation and its Magic in Spoken English:

Language has unique music and melody, and it is not the same all the time. Intonation is how a speaker communicates the meaning through tone and voice. The voice rises and falls, and the difference in the notes of the voice make tones. The meanings of the words do not switch, but the tone used furthered the intention or the emotion of the speaker. Thus, the way of using tone is called intonation.

Understanding intonations is essential to understanding the deeper meaning behind the words of the speaker. Many pieces of research have proved that tone and pitch of voice play a pivotal role in conveying more meaning than the words used by the emotions and shades of the speaker. Intonations are important in spoken English as they convey meaning in many ways. Changing the pitch of voice makes it high or low allows to provide additional information to the listener and performs various linguistic functions.

For example, 'Thank you' may be said in two ways:

Gratitude: voice starts high and ends low

Casual acknowledgment: Starts low and ends high

The pitch varies:

The rising up and falling down of pitch gives different tones to language, and these tones determine the meaning that is employed with each utterance.

High Fall: pitch falls from high to low

Eg: This time the performance was really remarkable.

Low Fall: pitch falls from mid to low

Eg: That's amazing

High Rise: pitch rises from low to high

Eg: Raj enjoys trekking, hiking and biking.

Low Rise: pitch rises from mid to high

Eg: Good to meet you.

Fall Rise: pitch falls to low and then rises again

Eg: I don't encourage any of you at this moment.

Rise Fall: pitch rises from low and again falls

Eg: We are going to France, England and after to America.

A good method to improve pronunciation is to listen to dialogues and repeat them with the same stress and intonation without deviating from the original sound/phoneme as the speaker pronounced.

How can a learner overcome the Barriers of speaking English???

The acquisition of an acceptable pronunciation, of the foreign language, is going to be a difficult and time-consuming affair. The learner of a foreign language would do well to realize the difficulties involved and to learn the sounds of the foreign language carefully and thoroughly. The exposure a person gets to a foreign language is usually less compared to the exposure received to the mother tongue.

The following are a few suggestions for honing pronunciation:

A teacher's role is quite essential in a process-oriented classroom. He/she assumes a more supportive

and positive environment and facilitates a variety of strategies rather than controlling in a rigid classroom to improve listening skills. Giving instructions, and providing instruments to increase knowledge and also for better comprehension of phonetics, phonetical transcription, sound discrimination, facilitating language lab to enhance the language skill. In this context, the learner should be an active participant in adopting the various strategies and skills. Effective discussion with classmates also helps to develop pronunciation. Should avoid the habit of swapping the phoneme of the mother tongue by continuing practice of correct sound/phonemes under the guidance of an efficient language teacher or by carefully listening to sounds and longer utter ness from the standard sound. Regular usage of equipped language labs increases the scope of developing listening skills, articular skills as well as speaking skills.

Developing the knowledge of phonetics through regular practice of word pronunciation dictionaries, and following good pronunciation books to familiarize oneself with the pronunciation is crucial. Proper practice of articular movement by using audio-visual-based software which provides a display of articular movement while producing sound helps for better practice of articular. By reading the maximum number of books, focusing and observing the rich voice modulation, and practicing the intonations give music and melody to the speech. Watching English news channels like BBC, CNN, Star World, NDTV, etc. helps to improve language in the race of following the reader and also improves Listening skills which caters to using the right way of pronunciation and helps to develop fluency in English.

Conclusion:

Intelligibility is regarded as among the major features ⁵ while assessing the language skills of an individual and considered as the fundamental understanding of individual communication ability. To develop and harnessing the power of language be language application will unlock the effective communication skills and empowers individual to be proficient in language. It is remarked that most non-native speakers have problems using correct pronunciation due to various reasons, the major among them is the influence of the mother tongue and its accent in communication English. The dissimilarities between the mother tongue and the English cause many difficulties in becoming proficient in the English language. Since language is a skill attention should be given by facilitators while transmitting a dynamic language learning eco system where individual can develop and refine their linguistic skills for real-world success.

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