

Improving Pronunciation – A Teaching Paradigm

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Introduction

Language is 'species-specific' and 'species-uniform' possession of man. It's God's special gift to mankind. It is our ability to communicate through words that makes us different from animals. "Language is the expression of thought by means of speech sound".

The above given definition of language points out that speech sounds are very important in English language because it is the sound that echoes the sense. With the help of speech sounds learner learns to communicate and pronounce the words and sentences and so on.

The Importance of Pronunciation

We write the spoken word. The written or the printed word is but a symbol of the spoken word. For conducting good speech habit attention must be paid to pronunciation, because it is the root of good speech. Indian learners of English aims at speaking a variety of English. Indian students aim is to learn to speak and write a normal or standard English RP.

Indeed, a pronunciation has great prestige and importance throughout the world, and for English taught as a foreign language it is more usually the ideal than any other and importance.

Pronunciation and it's Importance

"Pronunciation is the use of a sound system, stress, rhythm, intonation, fluency and pause in speaking".

The understanding of pronunciation becomes easier if learner knows various speech organs, given as follow:

- 1) Vocal cords
- 2) The palate
- 3) The Teeth
- 4) The tongue
- 5) Lips

Teaching English Pronunciation (AIMS):

Teaching pronunciation is fundamental to the teaching of listening and speaking. So, it is essential that the teacher of English in India should pay a good deal of attention to pronunciation. Thus, the second language learner should be trained to respond to a totally new sound system. Continuous speech is understood by the listener not merely because of his knowledge of the pronunciation of the individual words but also because of his ability to understand vocabulary, grammar and context meaning.

There are some aims of teaching pronunciation;

- 1) To cultivate audible & intelligible pronunciation.
- 2) Production of correct sound with proper stress, intonation, rhythm and fluency and pause.
- 3) To cultivate the habit of speaking long sentences and speaking for a long time.
- 4) To develop good speech manners with impressive postures and gestures.

Causes of Defective Pronunciation in India:

- 1) Substituting sounds from mother tongue.
- 2) Lack of knowledge of sound
- 3) Lack of knowledge of intonation and stress.
- 4) Teacher's defective pronunciation.
- 5) Lack of speaking opportunity.
- 6) No firm rules.
- 7) Lack of attention to English pronunciation.
- 8) Physical ability of the child.
- 9) Paucity of books on pronunciation.
- 10) Lack of exposure to the native pronunciation.

So, we should pay attention to above given points and try to develop pronunciation. Sometime these causes are major problem in the development of pronunciation.

Reasons of Teaching Pronunciation:

During childhood the speech habits are in the process of formation. Student requires much guidance and training in producing articulate speech.

Before the child actually starts studying English in school, the child acquires bad pronunciation of much word. This must be corrected by teacher.

The regional standard of English pronunciation is very low.

So, considering above points teacher should speak fluent English, he/she must use proper stress, intonation and pause. The teacher should explain spelling and pronunciation relationship in English.

Spelling and Pronunciation Relationship:

English language has vowels and consonants forming sound system of English. English language has 26 letters. (a, b, cx, y, z) in its alphabet. In RP Received Pronunciation there are 44 different sounds. They are further divided into 24 are consonants 20 are vowels.

In the initial stage teacher has to teach sound first and leave the introduction of letters to a later stage.

Ex – A for APPLE etc.

The second is to raise awareness of differences between sounds and spelling and their pronunciation practically.

Teacher should explain the relationship between spelling and pronunciation.

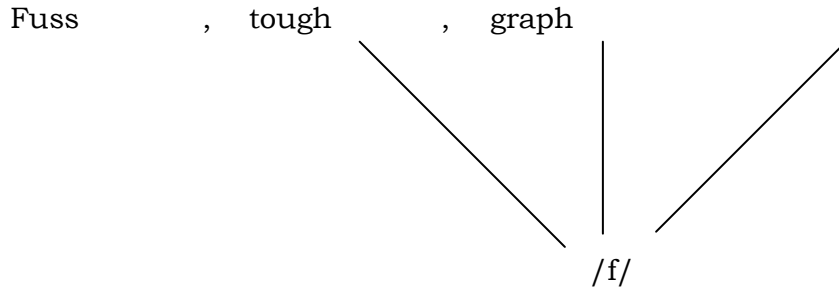
Ex – D-o-u-b-t = Doubt = /da:ut/

In English the same sound often represents several different letters of alphabets. Also, the same letter of the alphabet is often represented by different sounds.

Ex – ‘A’ letter stands for different sounds in

- Car- /ɑ:/-
- Wall - /ɔ: /-
- Bat - /æ /-
- Hate - /ei:/-

The consonant sound /f/ is represented by three different letters in –



For making a course in pronunciation effective, things need to attention for teacher

Segmental Pronunciation

Sounds are divided into two major category:

- 11) Vowel
- 12) Consonants

In initial stage of teaching vowel with pronunciation, teacher should give a practice of listening sounds.

❖ **Teaching individual vowel :**

Teacher should give the practice of each vowel with excellent pronunciation. First, teacher pronounces vowel and pupils should repeat after the teacher.

Pure vowel: Monophthongs

No.	Symbols (Vowel)	Key-words
1	i:	Beat
2	i	Bit
3	e	bet
4	æ	Bat
5	a:	Bar
6	ɔ	Cot
7	ɔ:	Caught
8	ʊ	Put
9	ʊ:	Food
10	ʌ	But
11	ɑ:	Bird
12	ə	About

Diphthongs

Sr.No.	Diphthongs	Key-words
1	ei	Late
2	ai	Ride
3	ɔi	Boy
4	əu	Go
5	au	Now
6	iə	Hear
7	uə	Poor
8	eə	Pear

When teacher teaches vowel individually, the teacher should not use phonetic transcription or theory in accordance with student. He/ she simply try to create ability within student that they should pronounce each sound in a perfect manner and proper pronunciation. It needs practice.

❖ Teaching individual consonants : at higher stage (college level)

Consonants are the sounds in which the movement of air from lungs is obstructed as a result of a narrowing a complete closure of the air passage. There are two types of consonant sound.

- 1) Consonant sounds
- 2) Consonant clusters

• **Consonant Sounds**

Sr. No.	Phonetic Symbol	Example
1	/p/	Put
2	/b/	But
3	/t/	Tea
4	/d/	Day
5	/k/	Call, key
6	/g/	Go
7	/f/	Fate
8	/v/	Voice
9	/θ/	Thin
10	/ð/	Then
11	/s/	Sit
12	/z/	Zeal
13	/ʃ /	Show
14	/ ʒ /	Measure
15	/ tʃ /	Chalk
16	/ dʒ /	Jug
17	/ m /	Mug
18	/n /	No
19	/ ŋ /	Song
20	/l/	Lake
21	/r/	Read
22	/h/	Hen
23	/w/	Water
24	/j/	Yes

After teaching consonants, teacher should explain that vowels and consonants form words and give practice of as possible as many words and then short sentences like :

- 1) Come on
- 2) Sit down

• **Consonants Clusters :**

CCS = Consonant clusters sound

A consonant cluster is a sequence of consonants which in English are found at the beginning or at the ending position.

- Initial Consonant Clusters :
 - 1) Two member CCS
 - /pl/ in plain
 - /pr/ in press
 - / st / in stitch
 - 2) Three member CCS (Consonant cluster sound)
 - /str/ in stream
 - /scr/ in screen
- Final consonant clusters :
 - 1) Two member CCS :
 - /sp/ in crisp
 - /mp/ in sump
 - 2) Three member CCS
 - /kst/ in mixed
 - /mpt/ in tempt
 - 3) Four member CCS
 - /ksts/ in texts
 - /ksθs/ in sixths

Teacher should give maximum practice of consonants clusters.

Practice Stages

Teaching individual sounds (vowels & consonants)

❖ Stage 1 : The practice stage

To teach individual sound use can be made sound contrast in isolation (/i/, /e/, /x/, /ð:/) the use of minimal pair which provide meaningful context of use –

/pin/-/pen/ = /i/ - /e/

/pan/ - /pun/ = /a/ - /u/

The teacher may also find it helpful to describe how a sound is made.

In practice stage can go with or be followed by sound discrimination exercise. In them the teacher encourages the pupil to participate in judging the same or different sound.

Example: bit pit sit eat
beat fit feet it

❖ Stage 2 : Further practice

The next stage should gradually move towards more demanding pronunciation exercise. It can begin with word elicitation wherein a problem sound is named and the pupils are asked for words to illustrate its use.

Ex. /z/ in zoo, lazy/zebra

The teacher helps ensure correct pronunciation. It can then move to sentence correction. The following “tongue twisters can be used”.

Ex. A cat sat on the mat.

Let the red spread stay on ted's bed.

❖ **Stage 3 : Activities and tasks**

The use of activities which relate the sound to contexts of use and also provide pupils, individual and in groups, opportunities to attempt tasks. Here, for example, is an activity that can be used to teach word. Pairs that differ in a single vowel –

Ex. Pin – pen

Eat – eight

Cheap – chip

Meat – met

Me – may

❖ **Activity 4:** The teacher provides a few dialogues each containing same words given above. Pupil reads dialogue in groups. Each group asks question. They learn their use first by reading to each other and then asking and answering questions.

Dialogue:

Raj: I'm looking for a pen.

Rahim : Did you say you are looking for a pin? I have many. Shall I give you one of my pins?

Raj: thank you but I'm looking for pen not a pin.

Rahim : sorry, I heard you say pin not pen. You can take one of my pens.

Raj: Thank you. This pen is pretty. Could I use it until the lunch break?

- Questions: 1) What was Raj looking for?
2) What did Robert say?
3) What happened at the end?

Super segmental Pronunciation

Stress, rhythm, intonation, fluency and pause play an important role in super segmental pronunciation.

For knowing about teaching pronunciation

a) Teaching Stress

“The degree of force with which sound or syllable in a word is uttered is stress”.

❖ English is a stress-timed language. Stress is important at both word and sentence level. It is important because it makes a difference in meaning.

Ex. Here it is not expected that teacher explains the word “Syllable” but he/ she divides the spelling and gives the practice of word stress correctly.

- 1) 'Object (noun) Object (verb)
2) 'record (noun) record (verb)

❖ Similarly the same sentence means different thing when words in it stressed.

Ex. Rajan was rude to the teacher.

(not Paul but Rajan)

(rude but not respectful)

Same activity to teach stress:

a) Teacher pronounces word and asks to class to say where the stress was placed.

Ex. 1) John's 'object is to pass test with credit.

2) His father objects to his choice of subjects.

b) Teacher should speak both right and wrong stress at various places and asks the class to say whether stress is rightly or wrongly placed.

Ex. Competent, competent, competent

c) Pupils read sentences aloud using contrasting stress.

d) Pupils say the same sentence with stress at different places in it and ask each other what it may mean.

Ex. Singh sang his best song in class.

e) The teacher can hum the stress patterns with a series of words or sentences on the board. The teacher asks the class to guess where the stress is or whether it is correctly placed.

b) Teaching rhythm :

It is the musical aspect of language. It makes pronunciation. It makes pronunciation more appealing than it would otherwise be. Rhythm is the metrical effect produced in verse, prose, music or motion by relations in quantity, stress, time or energy between the syllables, words, notes or movements that succeed each other.

English has stress-timed rhythm. It means equal time elapses between one stressed syllable or the next.

Ex. Jack and Jill went up the hill – To fetch a pail of water.

While teaching rhythm teacher should give regular practice with maximum sentences.

c) Teaching Intonation

Definition: When we hear someone speak, we realise that one doesn't always speak on same note. We hear constant variations in the level at which his voice is pitched sometime the pitch rises and falls. The pattern of variation of the pitch of the voice is called intonation.

Some following rules using, teacher can build awareness and provide meaningful practice in the use of a few basic intonation pattern.

a) Statement :

Ex. Jack lives alone in a large house.

A statement usually provides some information. The normal intonation pattern in it shows fall at the end.

b) Yes-No type questions :

Ex. Does Jack live in that large house alone?

In this verbal type question the intonation rises at the end of sentence and is placed on the stressed syllable of last word.

c) 'Or – question' :

ex. Would you like tea or coffee?

An 'or-question' asks listener to make a choice between two or more object. In it the first choice is indicating by rising intonation and second one is with falling intonation.

d) 'Wh-question':

Ex. How does jack manage to lie there alone?

A 'Wh-question' asks for information making use of word like 'what, when, where' etc. In this pattern the wh-word generally has higher intonation and there is falling intonation at the end.

So, intonation pattern plays very vital role in English. Teacher can use textual as well as out of textual sentences to give practice of intonation.

d) Pause and Fluency :

Pause means to stop for a while. While speaking English a pause should be given after comma, full stop etc. Pause can completely change the meaning of a sentence.

Ex. Boys read nicely.

Boys, read nicely.

For given pause teacher should explain the function of punctuations –

- 1) Full stop
- 2) Comma
- 3) Exclamations
- 4) Question mark
- 5) Colon
- 6) Semi-colon etc.

Fluency: It refers to saying word groups with no gaps or hesitations in the middle. Thus the words must be spoken without stumbling over the sound and sequence of sound.

Hence a good knowledge of sound system, stress, rhythm, intonation, fluency and pause is necessary for proper pronunciation.

Conclusion:

To sum up we can say that pronunciation or spoken English teaching is a great responsibility of teacher. In order to improve the pronunciation of the students the teacher has to pay attention on these features of pronunciation which are known to cause failure of communication. These include a few vowels and consonants.

Another important feature is pattern of stress, rhythm. It is important to pay specific attention on words and sentence stress in intonation patterns. There will be a need to provide good model of spoken English. These can be found in recorded cassettes but also listening to news broadcasts, discussion and description on national and international TV channels. English Language Labs are the best places where teachers can polish the pronunciation of the students.

A teacher who combines a sound knowledge of basic theory with the ability to serve as a model of good pronunciation will always make a positive difference for pupils to acquire LSRW skills.

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