

ESL Teaching - Avenues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Teaching the English language to a group of students who come from a regional medium of instruction has always been challenging. The affinity to their mother tongue creates obstacles in learning English. The main reason behind this problem is students' inclination to learn through translation. This is not an appropriate method for learning. Very often this leads to misinterpretation of words and their meaning, inheriting faulty pronunciations and accents. The present study explores the ways in which one can make the teaching of the English Language more effective and result oriented especially for students coming from a regional medium of instruction.

Introduction

English as a second language has been a part of the curricula right from the primary classes, or at least from middle school. Despite this, most of the students from the regional medium of instruction do not find themselves comfortable in English. The present study probes into its probable causes. Surprisingly, these are varied, pertaining to psychological, mental, and emotional aspects of the students and their cultural background as well.

Stumbling Blocks

The students from the regional medium of instruction often face difficulties while communicating in English. Their mindset plays a crucial role in this as the difficulty lies in the mind rather than in the task itself. The approach towards learning English needs to be positive. Inertia is another

stumbling block. The apprehension of failure and lack of confidence, prevent them from accepting new challenges.

As learning a language requires a closed loop system, the difficulties may lie at different levels as many organs are involved in the process.

- 1) Mind- Responsible for retention and partial syntax.
- 2) Tongue- Sound production, proprioceptive responses.
- 3) Ear- Auditory feed back

Unless all three are properly coordinated, errors can occur at different levels in language learning. Moreover, proprioceptive feedback works effectively only when the learner retains the memory of voice or specific words. Speaking aloud helps a student retain this memory of the sound.

In the Hindi dominated regions in India, English is often learnt through the Translation method. A study was carried out to analyze the difficulties that the students faced while learning English especially those whose mother tongue was Hindi. The students from the regional medium, in this case Hindi found it difficult to improve their spoken as well written skills for three reasons.

- 1) A natural inclination for the mother tongue (in this case Hindi).
- 2) The basic grammatical and phonetic differences
- 3) Indigenous faulty pronunciations(in some cases)

The greatest hindrance in the way of learning English as a second language is the student's affinity to Hindi. They learn English comparing it with the already set rules and standards of their mother tongue. This tendency compels them to translate words from their language into English. Translation is an inexact method to learn a language causing the following problems-

The subject verb orientation differs in both the languages.

In English the subject is immediately followed by the verb, where as in Hindi the subject comes first and the verb follows at the end of the sentence.

Each language has its own culture. In most of the Hindi speaking regions, the students learn it according to the already set standards of their indigenous language.

Faulty pronunciation is also carried forward from Hindi to English in some of the cases. Some of them are:

1. The inherent inability to discriminate between Pronunciation of 's' and 'sh'

This practice continues even when these students speak English

'Shirt' sounds as 'sirt'

'Shy' sounds as 'sie'

The faulty pronunciation in Hindi slowly creeps into their utterances in English too.

- 2) Students pronounce 'Lipstick' as 'Lipistick' and 'Station' as 'istation'
- 3) The Hindi letters 't' and 'd' letters are pronounced with greater emphasis. On the other hand these words are pronounced lightly in English. This makes a great difference in pronunciation. The same is the case with the letter 'r'.
- 4) Intonation- a rising intonation is generally observed in framing questions, in English. When students belonging to Hindi regions speak in English they use a falling intonation for framing questions.
- 5) Certain words like '-bag' 'tag' are not pronounced completely instead they are pronounced as 'beg' 'teg'. Their sound is contracted both in speech and writing.

An experiment was conducted on a group of twenty students to improve their

pronunciation and accents and also make them more proficient in English. They were provided a training program with a series of exercises meant to improve their grammar as well as pronunciation..

A tongue twister exercise including a series of words with 'sh' sound was designed for a group of students. After repeated sessions a remarkable positive shift was observed. The advanced exercises included sentences containing the noun+verb combinations of; sh; sounding words to clarify the difference between 'sh' and 's'.

Interactive games and puzzles including frequently mispronounced words also helped .

Other Effective Tools used were-

- 1) Puzzles and games
- 2) Vocabulary retention games
- 3) Tongue twister exercise
- 4) Self introduction
- 5) Framing short sentences
- 6) Defining a picture/scene
- 7) Situations posed
- 8) Emotive explosion
- 9) Extempore

Objectives of the study:- The study aimed at

1. A general assessment of pronunciation of regional medium students (especially from Hindi region).

2. To evaluate the effect of the technique used to improve pronunciation.
3. To examine whether the impact of indigenous language adversely affects their English pronunciation

Study Tools-An experiment was conducted on a group of twenty students. They were given an exercise that assessed their pronunciations prior to the test. The same group was trained for two weeks to improve their pronunciation through some chosen techniques.

Techniques Applied-

Various techniques were used to train the same group for two weeks. These include –

- Tongue Twister Exercises - to help them differentiate between –sh- and –s- sounding words.
 - Sentences like- See , how she shows her speech skills or She sells all the shells were included.
 - Pronunciation Check was implied through 'Linguaphone' exercises. (audio)
1. Students were taught to use dictionary for checking the right pronunciation and accent of words.
 2. Audio visual aids like language programmes were introduced

Statistical Analysis:-

The data collected was processed to get the values. 't' test was applied to analyze whether there was any remarkable difference between the results of the pre and

post training groups. Dependent and independent variables were identified in the study.

Hypothesis:- There was no significant difference in the English pronunciation of students in pre and post tests.

TABLE

Test	N	Mean	Difference of Mean	SD	t value	Remark
Pre Post	20	3.61 6.1	2.45	1.182183 1.071153	4.6561	Significant

It is evident that the results (mean scores) of the pre and post tests differ significantly. The value of t at .05 level of significance is found significant than the table value

Conclusion:

Pronunciation can be improved considerably after providing appropriate training to the students. Thus, ESL can be made more effective and target oriented if it is taught considering the educational background of the students. The basic tendency of the students to learn English through translation creates obstacles. Instead they should be motivated to learn English just as they have learnt their mother tongue

Suggestions

1. It requires practice in Reading, Speaking as well as Writing skills
2. An appropriate environment is required for learning English

3. Other than the syllabus the games, puzzles etc prove to be more effective.
4. Short stories can be made a part of the curricula.
5. Students can be asked to enact stories they are familiar with, from Hindi literature.

References

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