Developing Effective Pronunciation Skills through ICT among Tertiary Level Students

Dr. Suresh Kurapati,
Asst. Prof. English, Centre for Foreign Languages (English)
Gaya, Bihar, India

Abstract:

The information and communication technology has opened new avenues to learn correct pronunciation through ICT approach. The ICT brought a paradigm shift in language teaching and learning, especially in teaching and learning of English pronunciation skills. The traditional way of teaching-learning of pronunciation has a lot of limitations in learning. The traditional or non-ICT based teaching is most of the time teacher-lead and teacher-dependent without proper individual attention to the needs of the learners in crowded heterogeneous classrooms. In such a scenario, ICT-based language learning is a means to the existing problem. This paper brings out the issues of incorrect pronunciation among the Indian students and their ways of overcoming incorrect pronunciation. Then it introduces the communicative framework of pronunciation teaching for effective learning. It also brings out the contrast between the traditional way of teaching-learning pronunciation and ICT-based modern, effective, and learner centered teaching and learning of pronunciation through online. This paper also shares the results of ICT-based pronunciation learning. Finally, it also discusses the impact of learning through ICT.

Keywords: Effective Pronunciation; ICT-based teaching-learning; Self-directed learning; learner centeredness; ICT in pronunciation.

INTRODUCTION:

Pronunciation can be defined as how a particular word should sound when spoken aloud. Pronunciation focuses on the sounds a speaker should use for each part of a word and how they should be put together. In other words pronunciation is simply defined as how a word or words collectively uttered in the given context. Using correct pronunciation has been a great concern among the users of English language, especially, among the student of English language learning. Correct pronunciation of language is always desirable and it helps in attaining effective communication. Incorrect pronunciation leads to miss understanding of message in the inter-personal communication. Sometimes, it can lead to very serious consequences in communication. For example: a person who is in a sinking in ship, says, 'I'm sinking'…. 'I'm, sinking..' cries for help over a mobile but the other person who misunderstanding his pronunciation and asks him saying, what are you thinking about?' You can understand the end result. Therefore, correct pronunciation is always essential without any gray areas in 'intelligibility'.

Statement of the Problem:

It is a very well-known fact that it is difficult and not desirable to speak like an English man or an American but maintaining intelligibility or comprehendible utterance is desirable and never difficult to attain some

degree of it. For this many of us are live examples. In spite of this, many students at the tertiary level have issues of incorrect pronunciation. Moreover, the problem of incorrect pronunciation is pertinent to individual students. Each student has his/her own pronunciation problems. If a student has a problem with /v/ sound other student of the same class may have problem with /s/ sound. Though, In India we have been introduced RP (Received Pronunciation) at higher levels of education, most of the pronunciation problems are due to regional variations and social variations. The same sets of words are spoken in different states with different deviations. The other most important cause of pronunciation could be lack of direct correspondence between orthography of English language and its pronunciation. Most of the Indian languages have their direct correspondence between orthography and pronunciation. For example we write 'Maatha' and we pronounce 'Maatha'. When it comes to the English language the spelling of 'Pneumnia' begins with letter 'P' which is a silent letter in the word. Hence there is no direct correspondence between the orthography and pronunciation of English. This feature does not figure in the Indian languages. The second reason is that English language is not a native language but many English words entered into Indian language sometimes with wrong pronunciation. Such words became localized in our mother tongues, therefore such words pronunciation is taken for granted. If we examine a few words like 'bottle', school, and 'bus' became 'bothale', 'eskul' and 'baas' respectively. Based on the linguistic region, class, community English became Hinglish, Tinglish, Benglish, etc. Like the above, many factors affected English pronunciation and increased the rate of non-intelligibility. In order to be a good speaker having intelligibility is paramount.

The reasons for incorrect pronunciation:

In order to impart correct pronunciation, schools, colleges or universities have been teaching pronunciation skills in their courses for a week or ten days or a month. As I have already mentioned, the problems of pronunciation are individual rather than group problem at tertiary level. Addressing such problems in traditional classrooms is never easy and completely addressed to bring intelligibility among the students.

Major Issues involved in imparting of pronunciation:

- English is not our mother tongue but having mother tongue influence over it.
- Pronunciation of English language is different from orthography. It is a unique feature of English.
- Pronunciation Problems are individual -depends on one's mother tongue, linguistic region, nationality, the stage at which English is introduced, etc.
- Teaching a class of students for a few classes not more than 7 classes is not a great help and the duration cannot extended in any course keeping other things to be taught.
- The goal is having a standard English pronunciation for better intelligibility.

According to Zielinski (2006), specific features shown to cause a lack of intelligibility or mis-pronunciation include: i) misplaced or missing prominence ii) incorrect word stress, iii) insufficient differentiation in syllable duration an unnatural speech rhythm iv) lack of clearly articulated consonants both in final position and in stressed syllables v) speaking too slowly and too fast vi) too many pauses and long pauses and little variation in pitch, etc.

Necessity and need of teaching of phonetics:

According to Braj, B. Kachru (1989) use and spread of English has been increasing day by day. In his classification he gives the use and spread of English in the world in three areas i.e. Inner circle, Outer circle and Expanding circle. Though the English language originated from the inner circle i.e. England, America, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, the rapid spread of English taking place in outer circle i.e. countries like India, Sri Lanka , Kenya, etc. to expanding circle i.e. Iran, Iraq, Libya, etc. Today, English being the lingua-franca of the world, many countries and many people are interested in learning English language for the purpose of oral and written communication. As the number of people growing day by day, understanding English pronunciation of speakers or intelligibility became a major concern in the world. In addition to this, there is a demand for standard pronunciation form different domains like BPOs, MNC companies, and academic and research interest in foreign universities; inter-state communication, etc. are the needs of Indians.

Teaching of phonetics:

In such a scenario of high demand for correct pronunciation or maximum intelligibility, linguists started their work on the issue of pronunciation and established an international phonetic association in 1886. The primary function of the IPA was to identify the sounds of every language in the world. In that attempt, they also discovered 44 sounds of English language. It is often referred as phonetic alphabet which consists of 12 pure vowels, 8 diphthongs and 24 consonant sounds. The art of correct pronunciation lies in the acquisition of these 44 unique English sounds in different combinations. With these findings, all the curricula in the world stressed the need for formal learning of English sounds. Teaching or learning of pronunciation before the invention of IPA was based on the imitation of native speakers. It was often felt very difficult to learn the pronunciation by the second language learners due to non-availability of native speakers or native speaker environment in the given contexts. Even the classroom teaching of pronunciation was having many issues in imparting or learning of it. Learners could not get individual need of learning it and teachers were unable to focus on every student in crowded classrooms.

According to Celce-Murcia, M. a communicative framework for teaching English pronunciation includes the five steps:

Step 1: Description and Analysis – oral and written illustration of how the feature is produced and when it occurs within spoken discourse.

Step 2: Listening Discrimination- focused listening practice with feedback on learner's ability to correctly discriminate the feature.

Step 3: Controlled practice- oral reading of minimal –pair sentences, short dialogues, etc., with special attention paid to the highlighted feature in order to raise learner consciousness.

Step 4: Guided Practice- structured communication exercises, such as information gap activists or cued dialogues, that enable the learner to monitor for the specified feature. And

Step 5: Communicative Practice- less structured, fluency-building activities that require the learner to attend to both form and content of utterances.

The execution of the five steps in traditional or modern teaching of pronunciation is very essential

Hypothesis: Does ICT help in enhancing the students' pronunciation?

Emerging information and communication technologies for language learning:

With emerging theories of language learning and revolution in ICT, the teaching-learning has been changed time to time. The theories in pedagogy brought new concepts like 'learner centered' language teaching and learning. The theories also emphasize that the 'leaner autonomy' and 'complete participation' of the learners in the learning process for successful language learning. If we see the history of learning pronunciation in the world scenario or Indian scenario, it began with mere listening to the teachers with not much focus on learners' individual pronunciation problems. Teaching pronunciation was done through lectures and explanation of phonetic symbols or notations. Through lecture method or explanation method of teaching, certainly no teacher can pay individual attention to all the students in the classroom in the limited time. In such a scenario considering the ICT for individual maximum participation, need based pronunciation learning, interactive mode of learning are the key features.

Paradigm shift in teaching pronunciation through ICT:

Though the IPA discovered 44 English sounds, with the emerging IT and ICT the face of teaching and learning of phonetics have been changed from time to time with English teaching pedagogy. Though the teaching of phonetics began with the description of vowel sounds and consonant sounds with chalk and talk and later shifted to charting of the sounds primarily focusing on speech mechanism. The speech mechanism primarily consists of understanding the organs of speech and their mechanism. The descriptive study of sounds in turn involved with the study of consonant and vowel sounds. Teachers usually describe and explain the pronunciation of each English sound in detail. To explain the consonants sounds the descriptive explanations included place of articulation, manner of articulation and voicing. In this study the use of computers, the internet, video, audio, websites and online tools and other technology is referred as ICT.

Procedure of the study:

The participants of the study were 65 BA and 24 B.Sc. LLB (H) students of Central University of Bihar who were studying a course named English I: Communication Skills (ENG 111) who were in their first semester of their programme. Both the groups (BA and B.Sc.) were given both pre-test and post-test on identification of phonetic sounds of English. In between the tests the intervention using ICT-toll to learn pronunciation through websitenwas provided to the experimental group. Even for the control group the teaching of pronunciation took place in two weeks aiming at individual discrimination of all the English sounds and at the word level segmental and supra-segmental attention was focused. In the first class all the students were introduced phonetics and its relationship with pronunciation. Then all of them introduced all the 44 sounds of English. In the next phase the experimental group was expected to use BBC learning English web for learning and individual practice. The learners were given the choice of using their personal mobiles and laptop or desktops. The learners were asked to listen and identify the individual sounds and expected to practice and learn pronunciation of sounds of English in the classroom and out of the classroom. B.Sc. group was given classes not using any ICT for 2 weeks. And the learning and effectiveness of their success was understood in terms of their identification of individual sounds and at word level segmental (Vowel and Consonant) and suprasegmental (stress, rhythm, and intonation or prosody) features were assessed. Both the

groups were given classes on all the 44 sounds of English and results of the pre-test and post-test of the learners and results of one group against other group was analyzed. The pretest and post was used conducted using the three words for each sound and the sheet is provided in Appendix.

Results of the study:

The experimental group students who used ICT-tools to learning English through websites showed significant positive results in terms of segmental features and suprasegmental features when compared with the control group students. Along with this it was also observed that

1. Self-directed participation of the learners enhanced learner autonomy to learn what they are actually in need rather than learning all the sounds.

2. The experimental group showed a clear significant difference when compared with control group that they have really benefitted with ICT tools. The students were able to discriminate the sounds in minimal pairs very distinctly.

4. Experimental group learners were able to identify difficult sounds and practice such sounds which they felt difficult in their usage and they could identify and understood the short vowel and long vowels very easily.

6. Students those who used ICT could utter the sounds with appropriate place of articulation and manner of

articulation along with stress, rhythm and intonation.

Figure 1 IPA English sounds. Source BBC Learning English

Discussion and Conclusion:

The positive results may be attributed to the ICT because learner could select their interested varieties of English pronunciation, they could listen to the speech sounds and with notations at phonemic level and different combinations of word with bisyllabic and multisyllabic levels. The learners could feel the actual pronunciation of the speakers even in the second language context which actually creates an environment for the learners. Moreover, the ICT based teaching or learning comes handy with features of repetition and listening to the sound in slow motion and natural speed. Along with it, they could see the animation of articulation even forward and backward to understand the actual sue of articulators. This ICT-tool based learning of pronunciation certainly gave the learners an added advantage to learn the correct pronunciation by self-directing their learning towards the goal. Here the involvement of the learners was also observed

very high when compared with the control group because learners were learning with their own interest. It also helped them to check their own progress very systematically.

Conclusion:

It is observed that use of ICT tools helped the experimental group with empirical evidence so the interested teacher may move from tradition chalk and talk to ICT based language teaching tools for better results. In normal speech there will not be any control over speech and we cannot repeat the exact speech or utterance of the learners in the controlled environment. So, the interested teacher may use ICT tools for betterment of their teaching and learners can also experience a live native kind of experience using appropriate tools and variety of English. The only requirement is some initiation from the learners to use their ICT tools and teachers' knowledge and interest to implement in the classroom.

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Appendix-1

NO.	SOUNDS	WORDS	PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION
1		SHEEP	ʃiːp
2		PLEASE	pliːz
3	/iː/	THREE	θriː
4		SHIP	ʃɪp
5		CRICKET	krɪkɪt
6	/ɪ/	HISTORY	hɪstəri
7		FRIEND	Frend
8		BELL	Bel
9	/e/	SET	Set
10		SANDWICH	sænwɪdʒ
11		JAM	dʒæm
12	/æ/	HABIT	hæbɪt
13		FUNNY	fʌni
14		TRUCK	trʌk
15	/ʌ/	UNCLE	ʌŋkl
16		HEART	hɑːt
17		SCARF	skɑːf
18	/ɑː/	CALM	kɑːm
19		HOT	hɒt
20		SORRY	sɒri
21	/ɒ/	OFTEN	ɒf(ə)n
22		BALL	bɔːl
23		FORKS	fɔːks
24	/ɔː/	CORD	kɔːd
25		BOOK	bʊk
26		FOOTBALL	fʊtbɔːl
27	/ʊ/	COULD	kʊd
28		POOL	puːl
29		EXCUSE	ɪksˈkjuːs
30	/uː/	AFTERNOON	ɑːftəˈnuːn
31		GIRL	gɜːl
32		THIRSTY	θɜːsti
33	/ɜː/	WORKER	wɜːkə
34		WATER	wɔːtə
35		MOTHER	mʌðə
36	/ə/	QUARTER	kwɔːtə
37		MALE	meɪl
38		STATION	steɪʃən
39	/eɪ/	AGE	eɪdʒ
40		BUY	baɪ
41		FINE	faɪn
42	/aɪ/	KITE	kaɪt
43		OIL	ɔɪl
44		COIN	kɔɪn
45	/ɔɪ/	TOY	tɔɪ
46		COW	kaʊ
47		ABOUT	əˈbaʊt
48	/aʊ/	HOUSE	haʊs
49		BONE	bəʊn
50		FLOAT	fləʊt
51	/əʊ/	COAT	kəʊt
52		YEAR	jɪə
53		BEARD	bɪəd
54	/ɪə/	IDEA	aɪˈdɪə
55		CHAIR	tʃeə
56		STAIRS	steəz
57	/eə/	BEAR	beə

NO.	SOUNDS	WORDS	PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION
58		TOUR	tʊə
59		POOR	pʊə
60	/ʊə/	SURE	ʃʊə
61		PIN	pɪn
62		PAIR	peə
63	/p/	CAP	Kæp
64		BABY	beɪbi
65		BOY	bɔɪ
66	/b/	HANDBAG	Hændbæg
67		TABLE	teɪbl
68		CART	kɑːt
69	/t/	WRITE	raɪt
70		DOOR	dɔː
71		RIDE	raɪd
72	/d/	PLAYED	pleɪd
73		KITE	kaɪt
74		CURD	kɜːd
75	/k/	BACK	Bæk
76		GIRL	gɜːl
77		GLASS	glɑːs
78	/g/	BAG	Bæg
79		SUN	sʌn
80		PIECE	piːs
81	/s/	POSSIBLE	pɒsəbl
82		ZOO	zuː
83		ZIP	zɪp
84	/z/	BUZZ	bʌz
85		SHOE	ʃuː
86		ASH	æʃ
87	/ʃ/	SHOW	ʃəʊ
88		TELEVISION	tɛlɪˌvɪʒən
89		CASUAL	kæʒʊəl
90	/ʒ/	MEASURE	mɛʒə
91		CHIP	tʃɪp
92		CHAIR	tʃeə
93	/tʃ/	CATCH	kætʃ
94		JANUARY	dʒænjʊəri
95		RIDGES	rɪdʒɪz
96	/dʒ/	LARGE	lɑːdʒ
97		FAN	Fæn
98		SNIFF	snɪf
99	/f/	FEET	fiːt
100		VAN	Væn
101		VIEW	vjuː
102	/v/	ARRIVE	əˈraɪv
103		WINDOW	wɪndəʊ
104		WINE	waɪn
105	/w/	TWENTY	twɛnti
106		YELLOW	jɛləʊ
107		USE	juːz
108	/j/	YES	jɛs
109		HAT	Hæt
110		HOLD	həʊld
111	/h/	HEAR	hɪə
112		THIN	θɪn
113		THINK	θɪŋk
114	/θ/	PATH	pɑːθ
115		THAN	Ðæn
116		CLOTHE	klɒð
117	/ð/	EITHER	aɪðə
118	/m/	MOUTH	maʊθ

119		MAN	mæn		126		BRING	brɪŋ
120		TOMORROW	təˈmɒrəʊ		127		LETTER	lɛtə
121		NOSE	nəʊz		128		LIGHT	laɪt
122		CONE	kəʊn		129	/l/	EARLY	ɜːli
123	/n/	ELEVEN	ɪˈlɛvn		130		RAIN	reɪn
124		KING	kɪŋ		131		GRASS	grɑːs
125	/ŋ/	WRONG	rɒŋ		132	/r/	FREE	friː