ON TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TO THE ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN TELANGANA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this paper is to highlight some of the typical English pronunciation errors of the engineering students in Telangana State. The English pronunciation errors are presented with some apt examples. We dwell on both the segmental and the supra-segmental features. In the first part of the presentation some of the typical errors of vowels, diphthongs, triphthongs and consonants are presented. In the second part, we discuss the pronunciation errors of word stress and intonation. We put forward some remedial measures, which can help English teachers while teaching English pronunciation to the engineering students in Telangana.

INTRODUCTION

Almost all the pronunciation errors can be attributed to the fact that the engineering students do not distinguish between English letters and sounds. When they are asked to spell their names, they become unintelligible as their sounds are extremely distorted. They merely go by letters when it comes to English pronunciation. For example, when someone is asked to spell the name 'Hari' he/she invariably pronounces the first letter of the name Hari as [hetΣ]

instead of /eItΣ/. This clearly shows that they do not know how to pronounce some of the letters of English alphabet.

It is a well- known fact that many engineering graduates remain unemployed in India just because they lack the soft skills which are of paramount importance in the multi- national companies. One of the crucial well-established soft skills is spoken English which has become absolutely essential for all the engineering graduates because of ever increasing globalization. Though most of the engineering graduates know the functions of speech and speech acts, their English accent makes them unintelligible as a result of which they are shunned by many employers. We would like to examine the typical pronunciation errors of the engineering graduates and suggest some remedial measures.

Most of the pronunciation errors of the engineering graduates stem from the distorted English sounds. When these students go through the pronunciation drills in the language laboratory, they become aware of their pronunciation errors but there is little change in their pronunciation after the drills because of the fact that their pronunciation errors have been fossilized for a long time. Some of the fossilized pronunciation errors will be presented with a brief description of the nature of the pronunciation errors.

Apart from segmental features, we will also critically look at their accent in terms of word stress, weak forms, strong forms and intonation. More often than not, their speech is completely devoid of word stress and intonation. We will also briefly look at the use of weak forms and strong forms in their speech.In an effort to help such students neutralize their regional English accent, we will put forward some concrete measures.

It is a well know fact that there is no one to one relationship between letters and sounds in English. For example, the letter 'a' can be pronounced in different ways according to different phonetic environments in English.

Example: face

                        fact

                        about

                        father

The engineering students are completely oblivious to the basic facts of English pronunciation. More often than not they pronounce all the letters which they find in a word no matter whether the letters have corresponding sounds or not

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For example, the word 'plumber' has seven letters whereas it has five sounds in BBC English pronunciation. As opposed to BBC pronunciation, in Telugu English pronunciation, we find seven sounds, which correspond to seven letters.

Word	BBC	TE
plumber	/ˈplʌmə/	[/ˈplʌmbə/]

There is a widespread misconception among the engineering students that there are five vowels in English namely, 'a, e, i, o, u'. While teaching English pronunciation one is bound to come across this deep-rooted misconception time and again. Most of the students find it difficult to learn the central vowels and the back vowels. Very often they distort the English vowels or replace English vowels with Telugu vowels. Some of the typical pronunciation errors are:

Word	BBC	TE
cup	/kʌp/	[kʌppu]
girl	/gəːl/	[gəːrl]
teacher	/ˈtiːtʃə/	[ˈtiːtʃər]
hot	/hɒt/	[haːt]
bought	/bɔːt/	[bAːt]

Diphthongs:

Word	BBC	TE
gate	/geɪt/	[geːt]
noise	/nɔɪz/	[nɔɪs]
so	/səʊ/	[soː]
share	/ʃɛː/	[/ʃɛːr/]
pair	/pɛː/	[peːr]
fear	/fɪə/	[fIr]
poor	/pʊə/	[puːr]

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Triphthongs:

Word	BBC	TE
power	/ˈpaʊə/	[/ˈpavər/]
lower	/ˈləʊə/	[/ˈloːvər/]

Consonants:

Word	BBC	TE
think	/θɪŋk/	[thInk]
van	/van/	[veːn]
when	/wɛn/	[ven]
measure	/ˈmɛʒə/	[meʃər]

So far, we have presented pronunciation errors in terms of vowels, diphthongs, triphthongs and consonants. Now, we turn to suprasegmental features namely, stress and intonation.

As far as word-stress is concerned, most the engineering students do not pronounce the English words with stress. Moreover, they do not distinguish between verbs and nouns when it comes to stress. For example, they do not distinguish between noun '∀content' and the verb 'con∀tent'. More often than not they shift the stress to a wrong syllable in a word. For example,

BBC	TE
ˈseparate	separˈate
ˈdemonstrate	demonsˈtrate
ˈproduce (n)	proˈduce (n)
ˈcontent (n)	conˈtent (n)

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So far as the English intonation is concerned, many engineering students are completely unaware of different tones and their implications. For example, they barely know the difference between a Falling tone and a Rising tone. When they are asked to read a passage we hardly find any of the tones which we normally associate with British English pronunciation. For example,

    1. a.   ˵John likes music.

b.   John ˵likes music.

c.   John likes ˵music.

The fact that the above sentence can be a potential reply to three different questions, is completely unknown to the engineering students.

Thus, one possible interpretation is that the pronunciation to be more

Important. When it is needed for continued understanding:

In our own experience as students of English, pronunciation instruction has been sparse throughout our years in upper-secondary education, and most of our pronunciation 'abilities' have been acquired from activities outside the school environment. It is not until we reached university level that issues of pronunciation and the aspect of different varieties of English were brought to our attention academically. This observation is what initially led us into the area of pronunciation research. After conducting the present study, we see that the lack of explicit pronunciation instruction in upper-secondary education largely seems to be evident still to this day, and that the pronunciation that is taught in school is often done so as an add on when pronunciation errors occur. Given that the English-language education revolves around comprehensibility and intelligibility, and given that certain types of explicit pronunciation instruction have proven to increase those aspects of spoken English, one implication that can be made from this study is that English instruction in schools should consider devoting more time to teaching pronunciation explicitly, and not only address the issue as comprehensibility issues arise. Although comprehensibility and intelligibility seem to be the main goals of teachers studied in this, we still see that native-speaker ideals still partially exist in English classrooms today. As research suggests that achieving a native-like level of pronunciation is almost impossible for a non-native speaker of English (Thomson & Derwing 2015: 335), Consequently, since teachers still need to evaluate their students' pronunciation development, it might be a good idea to establish a clear international-English benchmark against which pronunciation could be assessed. In general, the syllabus needs to cover aspects of pronunciation so that teachers have clear guidelines to follow when it comes

to how pronunciation should be taught. Final Conclusion In conclusion, we argue that the findings of the present study have implications both for the field of pronunciation research as well as for pronunciation instruction in ESL settings. Thus, comprehensibility could be seen as a threshold which all learners must cross, but once a learner has crossed that threshold, a native-like accent is valued and seen as a logical progression. These views differ from those shown by teachers in previous research in the sense that the teachers in the present study seem to perceive nativeness and intelligibility as a continuum rather than two entirely separate aims. Furthermore, our findings suggest that pronunciation instruction still is a relatively neglected ,irrelevant for most learners, but that "better" or "more interested" students should aim to consistently use a certain native model. This suggests that while comprehensibility is enough as a starting point, teachers still regard a native accent as the ultimate goal for learners of English. We argue that this is a highly relevant finding which requires further investigation. One point of inquiry could be to investigate for which learners' teachers consider pronunciation instruction to be important and at which levels pronunciation should be taught.

We strongly feel that the engineering students should be exposed to BBC English pronunciation in the language laboratory as much as possible. Moreover, they should be given pronunciation drills especially in segmental features. They should be trained both in recognition and production of English sounds and word-stress. These measures will help the engineering students improve their English accent to a large extent.

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