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“The Role Of Pronunciation In Acquiring Language Proficiency”

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Teachers should be careful in differentiating between hearing and listening. It has been beautifully pointed by Joanne Kenworthy in the following words, “It is significant that in English and in many other languages we can make a distinction between hearing and listening. Hearing requires more presence on the part of the ears and listening requires work.” In setting goals for the learners, we must consider the effect of mispronunciation on the listener. The role that our Indian native languages play should make the teacher conscious about the problems of pronunciation (individual sounds) and also a combination of sounds and features such as stress, rhythm and intonation. The factors such as age, nature and duration of exposure, phonetic sensibility, attitude to learn and a strong motivation to learn well are to be noted. In the process of making the learners aware of pronunciation, the English teacher must undertake the following steps.

1. Getting them aware about „sound“ two types- vowels and consonants where the latter surrounds the former. Sounds occur in groups, the phenomenal of linkage of sounds adds to the naturalness of the speech. An example, “ Not at all”. When one strings them together into a phrase, he in his natural way does not pause between the words, but moves smoothly from the “t” sound at the end sound like the word tall.
2. Words having more than one syllable have their own governance, for example when one syllable stands out more prominently than others, that syllable is pronounced slightly louder , holding the vowel a little longer and pronouncing the consonants very clearly. This brings in the word stress, example, table, book, spoon. Polysyllabic words have several stresses but one as main.

3. English speech is time stressed; it has a beat as in music. Within each group there are strong and weak beats, the tendency for the strong, the tendency for the strong beats to fall on the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs (words with principal meaning) and for the weak beats to fall on prepositions, articles, pronouns(words with grammatical function). This builds up the rhythm. When a syllable is stressed in a sentence, its pronunciation is often quite different from when it is stressed. The unstressed position often forms a weak form.

The Importance of Pronunciation in Language Learning

Learning a new language can be a challenging task, but one that is incredibly rewarding. While grammar, vocabulary, and syntax are all essential components of learning a new language, one aspect that is often overlooked is pronunciation. Pronunciation plays a crucial role in language learning because it affects how well you can communicate with others, your listening comprehension, and your ability to be understood. In this article, we will explore the importance of pronunciation in language learning, and why it should not be underestimated.

Why is Pronunciation Important?

Pronunciation is the way in which we produce the sounds of a language. It is an essential element of language learning because it affects how well we can communicate with others. If our pronunciation is poor, we may struggle to be understood, even if our grammar and vocabulary are correct. This can lead to frustration and a lack of confidence in speaking the language.

In addition to affecting our ability to communicate, pronunciation also plays a crucial role in listening comprehension. If we cannot hear the sounds of a language correctly, we may struggle to understand what others are saying. This can make it difficult to engage in conversations and can hinder our language learning progress.

Finally, pronunciation can affect our ability to be understood by others. If we have a heavy accent or mispronounce words, native speakers may struggle to understand us. This can be frustrating for both parties and can hinder our ability to build relationships with native speakers.

The Benefits of Good Pronunciation

Having good pronunciation can bring many benefits to language learners. Firstly, it can improve our confidence in speaking the language. If we can pronounce words and phrases correctly, we are more likely to feel confident in our ability to communicate with others. This can lead to a more positive language learning experience and can encourage us to continue learning.

Good pronunciation can also improve our listening comprehension. If we can hear the sounds of a language correctly, we are more likely to understand what others are saying. This can make it easier to engage in conversations and can improve our overall language learning progress.

Finally, good pronunciation can improve our ability to be understood by others. If we can speak clearly and accurately, native speakers are more likely to understand us. This can make it easier to build relationships with native speakers and can help us to integrate into the culture of the language we are learning.

How to Improve Your Pronunciation

Improving your pronunciation takes time and practice, but there are several ways to do so. Firstly, it is important to listen to native speakers as much as possible. This can help you to learn the correct pronunciation of words and phrases and can improve your listening comprehension.

Secondly, it can be helpful to work with a language tutor or take a pronunciation class. These resources can provide you with feedback on your pronunciation and can help you to identify areas for improvement.

Finally, it is essential to practice speaking the language as much as possible. This can help you to develop muscle memory for the correct pronunciation of words and can improve your overall speaking ability. It can be helpful to record yourself speaking and listen back to identify areas for improvement.

Received Pronunciation

English is spoken as a first or second language by a very large number of people through out the world. In some countries such as the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia, English is the native or first language. In other countries such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, etc. English is spoken as a non-native or second language. As there is such a wide range of variation in pronunciation and accent, it is essential for us to follow a standard. One native regional accent that has gained social prestige is the Received Pronunciation of English. It is the pronunciation of the people of south-east England and is used by educated English speakers. Correct pronunciation of words in English requires an understanding of the different sounds of spoken English.

Vowels: We were taught there are five vowels- a, e, i, o , u. But indeed there are as many as twenty vowel sounds in English. Out of these twenty vowel sounds, twelve are pure vowels and eight of them are a diphthongal glides. It means that out of these twenty vowel sounds, eight are a combination of two vowel sound, it is called a diphthong. Apart from these twenty vowels there are twenty four consonant sounds.

A vowel is a sound in spoken language, such as the English 'Ah' [a] or oh! [O], pronounced with an open vocal tract so that there is no build up of air pressure at any point above the glottis. This contrasts with consonants, such as English 'Sh!' [ʃ], where there is a closure at some point along the vocal tract.

Pure Vowels: A vowel sound whose quality does not change over the duration of the vowel is called a pure vowel.

Consonants

A consonant is a speech sound that is articulated with complete or partial closure of the vocal tract. Examples are /p/, pronounced with the lips; /t/, pronounced with the front of the tongue; /k/, pronounced with the back of the tongue; /h/, pronounced in the throat; /f/ and /s/, pronounced by forcing air through a narrow channel; and /m/ and /n/, which have air flowing through the nose.

Word Stress

For the transcription of the words, we need to know where to stress a word. English is an accent- based language, and that in a word not all the syllables are pronounced with equal emphasis. For example, in the word ability is – bi and not ‘a’ that is heard prominently. If you look up in the dictionary for this word, it would be seen something like /əˈbɪləti/. Notice the little mark ‘ˈ’ after /ə/ and before- /bɪləti/ this is known as word stress. Now this stress changes the way a word is to be pronounced. Because of the shift in the stress, the corresponding vowel sound and consequently the pronunciation changes completely.

When the word is used as a noun or adjective, the stress is on the first syllable. When the word is used as a verb, the stress is on the second syllable. Example:

Noun/ Adjective Verb

ˈproduce proˈduce

ˈrecord reˈcord

Intonation

When we hear someone speaking, we observe that the person does not speak on the same note throughout. We find frequent rises and falls in the person’s voice. This variation in the pitch patterns of voice is called intonation .while speaking we glide over the less important words such as pronoun, articles, verbs, prepositions and conjunctions which are called functional words in English, whereas nouns, principal verbs, adjectives and adverbs which are called content words are stressed more. Very simply put it is simply the rising and falling sounds of the voice when speaking. This is

something we are very well aware of – as in the characteristic intonations of a questioning statement. Intonations are the reason why when a non-native speaker speaks a language by pronouncing each and every word of the sentence as individual sounds- the effect of the spoken language is very different from the effect a native speaker has. Hence, in a lot of ways it is intonation which creates accents and distinguishes one accent with another. Pitch fluctuations might be either in terms of rising pitch or falling pitch. Generally speaking there are four principal kinds of intonations:

Peaking (pitch goes up and then falls down)

Dipping intonation (falls and then rises)

Rising intonation

Falling intonation

Intonation normally can serve different purposes in language:

These can be:

Informational: answering a question through the use of intonation

Grammatical: Use of intonation for converting a statement into a question.

The intoned version “He saw a man in his backyard at that late hour” versus the flat “

He saw a man in his backyard at that late hour!!”

Attitudinal: intonation is also used while speaking to convey the attitude of the speaker, i.e., show approval, disapproval, dissent, assents, etc. Inquisitive: seeking information by adopting a questioning intonation.

Homophones

Homo means same and phone means sound. A homophone is a word that is pronounced the same as another word but differ in meaning. The words may be spelled the same, such as rose (flower) and rose (past tense of ‘rise’), or to, two, and too.

Examples:

Buy – purchase

By – beside

Knew – did know

New – not old

Homonyms

Homonyms are words in which spelling or sound can be same with differ meaning.

Sometimes homophones and homonyms are same.

Bank – side of river

Bank – This provides financial services

Tense – nervous

Tense – time of action

Eponyms

An eponym is a word which is derived from the name of a real, fictional, or mythical character or person. Most eponyms originate from a person's surname: boycott, for instance, from the Irish landlord Captain Charles Boycott.

Conclusion

In conclusion, pronunciation plays a crucial role in language learning. It affects how well we can communicate with others, our listening comprehension, and our ability to be understood. Having good pronunciation can bring many benefits to language learners, including improved confidence, better listening comprehension and the ability to build relationships with native speakers. While improving pronunciation takes time and practice, it is an essential component of language learning and should not be overlooked.

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