

Factors Affecting the Students Speaking English as A Second Language In Schools

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Abstract

There are many difficulties and problems in learning English as a second language (L2). They have problems in understanding and coping up with different mistakes in English pronunciation, grammar, orthography and vocabulary usage. One needs to be totally involved both physically and emotionally to understand, interpret the linguistic ideas. Through this article the main focus is dealt on secondary students in India who study English as a second language and they face problems in speaking and communicating with proper pronunciation. As a student of secondary class, pupils have very limit resources to learn, practice and converse in English during their short stay in school and very problem is that English is learnt as a subject rather than a language. In India, most of the schools give more importance to marks in their examination due to this they are stressed out and they don't give importance to actual learning. One of the main reasons why students are lagging behind in English is which, in turn results in low self-esteem and feel burdened and face guilt feeling of not being able to speak the language properly. From an academic point of view, the education is conducted will be difference from Indian ways. This study is an analysis of source, causes of the problems in learning English as second language; to find whether there was any significant difference in the causes of problems face by the students on the basis of different attributes variables such as sex, locality, habit of reading English dailies and habit of listening to English news. English as a second language has the problem related to inheritance of mother tongue language and translation of English into their mother tongue.

KEYWORDS: Orthography, L2, Pronunciation, Linguistic

INTRODUCTION:

The importance of learning English has tremendously increased in the recent past at least in the cities. But in the rural areas, students do not get enough encouragement to improve their English language skills, especially the English speaking skills and proper pronunciation. Hence there is a need to analyze the factors that are involved in speaking English and proper pronunciation of English words. Students are suggested to take some measures in order overcome their difficulty in spoken English skills and fluency of the language with proper pronunciation.

In India English is taught as a second language (L2) and its learning becomes a lifelong process and it demands lots of challenges on the learner side. In India English was introduced as a L2 during colonization English is recognized as international language in the recent past because it is widely used in business, science, technology and exchange of bilateral ties among nation. In India English is taught to all school children only few decades ago. Normally Indian students are exposed to

learning English in Primary and Secondary levels. The spread of English culture has two sides one represents those who use English as second language or foreign language, because of such use English varies from broken English to almost native language, because of this English has actually elevated it to the status of an International language.

Problems faced by Indian students in learning English as Second language (L2)

1. What are the problems faced by students speaking English as second language?
2. What are the problems faced by the students in schools in pronouncing some English words?

The Role of English in our society:

“Language is a system of arbitrary symbols which help the people of a particular community of communicate and to interact”.

In a vast country like India, majority of the population live in the rural areas. Students find it difficult to learn English, in listening, speaking, reading and writing. The main causes for the student difficulties in speaking English is the Environment that does not support to speak English fluently. Most of the secondary students study English as their second language and their mother tongue always or usually happens to be their first language. In our country many small vulnerable language communities are in the process of being getting extinct by other more powerful cultures and languages. On the contrary due to the advancement and progress in the development works in various fields, there is a general belief among the public that the importance of learning English due the effect of globalization and liberalization.

In our country, there is vast distribution of population from one region to the other, mainly for education and various other business activities, to communicate people use English either verbally or in the form of text that is written form which is mostly in English. So it is one of the reason that it become a link language. The parliament has also recognized English as an official language along with Hindi. In order to explore to the outer world the use of English is very much essential to develop ourselves culturally and socially so that we can stay in par with the brilliants and acts as a shortcut window to the world.

According to the British Council (www.bces-india.com), “the world is developing in the field of science and technology. Scientific inventions in Germany, France and Russia can reach India only through the help of English language and India must keep up with the progress of the world in the field of science. Therefore, English is inevitable of our country. In India, the official language in corporate world is English. A person can make rapid strides in the management ladder only if he can speak English fluently”.[1]

It is very much evident from the fact that, the production and growth will face a drastic decline if people find difficulty in expressing their brilliant ideas. The credit for all the hard work will be snatched away by the people who speak good English. There is a high demand because of the rapid growth at all sphere of life the latest growth internet and in software field.

The world’s population would be reaching 9.4 billion by 2050 as estimated by the Population Bureau (www.prb.org). By 2050 the number of languages that will be

in continuous to function will be 2875 according to the latest edition of the Ethnologue.[2]

NEED FOR THE STUDY:

“I would have English as an associate, additional language, which can be used not because of facilities, but because I do not wish the people of non-Hindi areas to feel that certain doors of advance are closed to them. So I would have it as an alternative language as long as people of India require it” Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru.

English is often learned because of its literary heritage, because of the status it may confer on the reader or speaker, because of the doors it opens in technology, science, trade and diplomacy.

In India, less than fifty years after John Adams prophecy RajaramRoy(1772-1833) wrote a historic plea to Lord Amherst. In December 1823, trying to overcome his silence, he “humbly” says, “The present Rulers of India, coming from a distance of many thousand miles to govern a people whose language, literature, manners customs, and ideas are almost entirely new and strange to them, cannot easily become so intimately acquainted with their real circumstances as the natives of the country are themselves.”

The spread of English, and its adoption across cultures and languages, should be reassuring for societies that believe bilingualism (or multilingualism) is an aberration. In reality, acquiring and maintaining another language has historically been a normal human activity and mono-lingualism is not an ideal state. It is through other tongues that other cultures can be appreciated and perhaps understood. The Indian pragmatist Mohandas K. Gandhi (1864-1948) said it so well: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want cultures of all lands to blow about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet anyway” (John, n.d. epigraph)[3]

What of the Statistics?

The number of people for whom English is the mother tongue (L1) is widely agreed to be around 350 million. This figure is based mainly on the population and school statistics, of countries such as the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, New Zealand. The comparable figure of non-native speakers of English has been roughly estimated at about 700 to 750 million.

Speaking is the primary thing required by a person to interact with his fellow beings. It is very much clear from the Examination Results at the Secondary level, there are many failures in the English paper because their medium of instruction is regional language which is not English, and their spoken English and soft skills are not very good.

According to Johnson, (1998:3), “fluency refers to the absence of pauses and other indices of word finding (or grammatical) difficulty. It is the natural language use of “the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the students” in situation where the learners focus is on the effective communication of meaning.

Students need to recognize that speaking involves certain fundamental characteristics to be fulfilled. Burnkart (1998) explains that language learners need to have three areas of knowledge involved within speaking namely”

- i) mechanics of language elements (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary) which emphasize on use of right words in the right order with correct pronunciation.
- ii) the function of language that deals with speaking performance in the form of transaction and interaction. (example: knowing how to change information and giving the clarity of essential message)
- iii) the socio-cultural norms (such as turn taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speakers, relative roles of participants) understanding how to take into account who is speaking to whom, in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason)

The person one who speaks should be very conscious of what he/she is speaking and the topic that is being spoken and the language that is used in order to be understood easily by the listener and to whom he/she is speaking.

Hence speaking is a tool to communicate one's ideas to the need of the listener's and it is systematically presented. (Tarigen, 1987 cited in Musaddat 2008). So the speaker should make his best efforts to clearly present his ideas that can be accepted well in accordance with what is required by the listeners.[4]

English that has been thought in the past, take into consideration of large classes. For example if one addresses a large class there is a lot of difference between social, economic and cultural differences and their local conditions.

Students in the West are not reluctant to asking questions or even interpreting their ideas with other known language. In our country India, many students remain silent even when they want to ask questions, it is mainly because the students are conscious of making errors in front of the classmates.

There are some English examples which do not encourage oral communication, namely:

- i) A real man should be good at thinking, but weak at speaking.
- ii) Keep your mouth shut but your eyes open.
- iii) Silence is gold.

It is learnt that some students in school are even afraid to speak in English, the way they pronounce the words, getting punished by teachers and parents. The students try to avoid speaking in class because of making errors, so they avoid oral communication in English during class hours.

In order to have better communication among students and to interact with people in the society, it is very much necessary that students have to improve their speaking skills. Speaking is a basic skill which can express to the outer world in an effective manner and it is very vital to facilitate these skills in mastering the English language. It creates a bridge between the people to communicate and share their opinions, thoughts, feelings, perception and ideas, by sharing their concepts and information. There will be better communication between the listener and the speaker and it will improve their interaction on the subject that they discuss. With the help of

speaking skills there can be the conversation and healthy arguments; through processing information and correcting its actual meaning it is possible to convey their ideas in a more measuring manner.

It is been observed that many English learning students would have learnt English right from their primary level and find it really very difficult in expressing their views in spoken English form, because of their inability to speak fluently with proper usage of grammar and right vocabulary.

There are different situations and audiences where we need to use English, speaking is purpose-driven and it involves expressing our ideas and opinion or a desire to do something, and maintaining social relationships in the society.

Burnett and Myes (2004:24) put forward the following spoken language that may be used in different ways:

Explaining	suggesting	discussing	reporting
Instructing	speculating	arguing	narrating
Summarizing	negotiating	clarifying	directing
Persuading	planning	informing	presenting
Questioning	disagreeing	analyzing	hypothesizing
Evaluating	describing	expressing	reasoning

It is very evident from the fact that speaking always happens in “real time”, hence it can be particularly difficult compared to listening, reading and writing. [5]

Generally, there are at least five components of speaking skill concerned with it such as following (Widiastuti cited from Syakur 1987:3, in <http://etd.eprints.ums.ac.id/332/>):

- a. Comprehension
Oral communication certainly requires a subject to respond, to speech as well as to initiate it.
- b. Grammar
It is needed for students to arrange a correct sentence in conversation. It is in line with explanation suggested by Heaton (1978:5) that the student’s ability to manipulate structure and to distinguish appropriate grammatical form in appropriate ones. The utility of grammar is also to learn the correct way to gain expertise in a language in oral and written form.
- c. Vocabulary
One cannot effectively communicate or express their ideas both in oral and written form if they do not have sufficient vocabulary. So, vocabulary means the appropriate diction which is used in communication.
- d. Pronunciation
Pronunciation is the way the student produce clearer language when they speak. It deals with the phonological process that refers to the component of a grammar made up of the elements and principles that determine how sounds vary and pattern in a language.
- e. Fluency

Fluency can be defined as the ability to speak fluently and accurately. Fluency in speaking is the aim of many language learners. Signs of fluency include a reasonably fast speed of speaking and only a small number of pauses and “ums” or “ers”. These signs indicate that the speaker does not have to spend a lot of time searching for the language items needed to express the message (Brown.1997:4)[6]

Language Proficiency of Students and teachers plays a vital role in making students at secondary school level to speak in English. In India “ low proficiency in English worked as a barrier for teachers in using English as the only language of instruction. That is by many teachers choose local language for teaching. It is observed that usually classes are held in both Kannada and English so that the students can comprehend better”Students’ language proficiency is particularly low in rural areas and the socioeconomic status of the students in rural areas appeared to be a major reason for the low proficiency of the students. Many teachers in the rural area said that since students in these areas came from under privileged and uneducated poor families, they did not find anyone at home to help them learn English and they received little exposure to English language outside the classroom. “Students are from poor and uneducated family. Students of rural area listen to English only when they are in school. They do not get any language input when they are home whereas those kids of urban area get help from their private tutors. Their educated parents can also help them with learning English and their English language skill is more developed.

- Most of the teachers who teach English had only a course

In India English is taught and learnt as a second language (L2) in most of the public and private schools at primary and secondary levels. It is very difficult to improve the learning skills of the students in English in L2. According to Brown (2000), in order to master the English language, learners have to be adequately exposed to all of the four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Language teaching in this country is currently focusing on the teaching and learning of the four language skills. However, the standard of English among INDIAN children is on the decline despite learning English for several years. INDIAN students are still weak in English, especially in their speaking and writing skills. They still seem to commit errors in all aspects of language.

According to James (1988) errors in writing such as tenses, prepositions and weak vocabulary are the most common and frequent type of errors that are committed by learners. Since grammar is seen only as a means to an end, some learners tend to re-emphasize its importance and in the process, they make many more errors. The learners usually face difficulties in learning the grammatical aspects of the Target Language (TL), such as in subject-verb agreement, the use of preposition, articles and the use of correct tense. In fact making mistakes is a natural process of learning and must be considered as part of cognition. As a result, errors must be viewed positively. Teachers have to recognize that “learning ability varies from person to person”. In addition, “all language learning is based on continual exposure, hypothesizing and, even with the correct hypothesis, testing and reinforcing the ideas behind them”[7] (Bartholomae, 1980: 97). Therefore, Error Analysis is the best tool European Journal of Social Sciences – Volume 8, Number 3 (2009) 487 for describing and explaining errors made by speakers of other languages. By investigating students’ written work, it will provide a means to help INDIAN teachers to recognize the importance of errors

as one of the challenging areas in teaching English. (European Journal of Social Sciences – Volume 8, Number 3 (2009))

It is observed that students find it difficult to understand the lessons being taught if a teacher who isn't acquainted with multiple languages but their mother tongue. They don't have good rapport with their student and interacting with them becomes difficult as they lack the knowledge of vernacular languages. Translating those terms and words; retaining the rhythm of "Indianism" as a teacher and also a facilitator that, only a multilingual and multicultural teacher can easily teach.

English is being taught at the degree level as a compulsory subject, of all colleges and universities throughout India. English has been medium of instruction in most of the higher education institution across India. Thus there is a huge demand of English on the whole and it keeps increasing, on contrary the spoken English with correct pronunciation is the most neglected portion in our schools. Not alone in secondary and higher secondary students, even in higher education the students of India have many problems in pronunciation.

The main reasons are because of first language interference is dominantly present in their English pronunciation because their pronunciation is influenced by different Indian dialects. Many students are not familiar with International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols. Even teachers do not motivate to improve their English pronunciation. By comparing English with the other languages in India, the rhythm is based on arranging long and short syllables, not stressed and unstressed ones. Hence, there is large of a spelling pronunciation amongst Indian speakers of English.

With this regard, Cook (2002) thinks learner's second language(L2) is affected by their first language (L1)for the following:

1. Sounds: learning of pronunciation depends on aspects other than the phoneme, for example: distinctive feature.
2. Syllable structure: L2 learner's simple use consonant clusters and add extra 'epenthetic' vowels often to fit the first language.
3. Voice onset time: L2 Learners gradually acquire the L2 ways of voicing stop consonants. Their first language is affected by their knowledge of the second language.
4. Intonation: L2 learners are still capable of discriminating tones. L2 learners have strategies for dealings with newintonation[8] (2002, pp 69-83)

Factors responsible for students not able pronounce English words correctly:

With interaction the teachers and students the factors depends: social factors- teachers do not motivate students and even the peer groups and family members do not take it serious about pronunciation. In second language (L2) English learning there is lack of efficient English teachers in phonetics and phonology, some teachers blame lack of awareness among students and teachers for low standard of English. Teachers are not much cooperative and students themselves are not responsible to produce Standard English.

SAMPLE STUDY

A sample study was carried among the students of secondary school students in a private school, in Bangalore. They have English as second language and their first language is Kannada, their mother tongue. A total of around fifty students were chosen for questionnaire. The questionnaire consisting of two main aspects namely:

1. to collect information about the students exposure to English language.
2. to elicit the linguistic data to test the student's knowledge of speaking skills.

It was carried out in the form of an interview and in a more friendly conversation manner. The speaking skill of the students was graded between 0 to 5.

Section 1:

Students were asked about their exposure to English language.

- a) Watch English News—only around 20% watch English News.
- b) Watch English Movies---around 50% of the students informed that they watch English movies.
- c) Reading English Newspaper---only 20% read English Newspaper.
- d) Reading English Books---only 10% read English Books.
- e) Interact with friends and family members in English---only 15% converse with their friends and family members in English.

Section 2:

Students were tested on the speaking skills and pronunciation.

The outcome through this test was that more than 50% students scored 2.5 out of 5, others scored less than 2.5 on their speaking skills. Many students did not have the fluency of speaking in English, even correct pronunciation is not followed by many students and neutral accent is not maintained as many have the mother tongue influence in their accent while pronouncing some English words.

Recommendations:

It should be ensured that English language is taught by use of English in the classrooms.

Reforms should be brought in the examination pattern.

A separate practical examination should be conducted in spoken English for High school students.

A language laboratory should be set up to learn phonetics of English language.

Students should be encouraged and develop the aural and oral skills.

They should have more reading tests in schools which will improve their pronunciation.

There can be suggestion for improvement in the curriculum. They need to motivate the teachers to imbibe the culture of referring to dictionary among the students.

Students should be encouraged to read English newspaper during prayer during prayer hours.

Students should have separate library hours and they should encourage to read English novels, poetry journals and magazines.

Students should be encouraged to communicate in English and may impart the spoken aspects of the language.

They should also develop their habit of learning from English news and referring to dictionary.

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