

Problems faced by asian students in english pronunciation



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Introduction

Speaking regarded as the most important and difficult micro-skill of the four skills in foreign language learning. Most adult non-native students of English in the UK particularly Asian students face a lot of difficulties when they speak English and they sometimes get frustrated when they could not understand or be understood by native speakers of English. Therefore, they encounter the same problems that confront any students studying in a foreign culture, such as grammar, pronunciation, listening comprehension and different cultures. Also, it is difficult for them to adjust to the English language especially when they speak it. They may have difficulty understanding class lecture, making them feel reluctant to participate in class discussion, seminars and tutorials. This essay will first explain and evaluate only one issue that face adult Asian students in UK when they speak English which is English pronunciation. Therefore, pronunciation is a difficult aspect in language learning for adult Asian students which lead to real barriers to communication and can contribute to motivation with native English speakers. This essay also will examine what are the most frequent difficulties encountered them in English pronunciation, the factors that affecting the pronunciation of non native students of English , some solutions to surmount the difficulties of mispronunciation among Asian adult students and finally it will throw some light on the implications of language teaching.

Literature review:

Teachers of English as a FL or a L2 know so well how important pronunciation is. Nevertheless, sometimes it has been obvious that a teacher has been paid little attention to the students' pronunciation in the process of <https://assignbuster.com/problems-faced-by-asian-students-in-english-pronunciation/>

second language learning and teaching. Celce & Goodain(1991) states that over the past years, there have been different views about the value of teaching pronunciation in language teaching and they reported that the cognitive approach and grammar translation reading based method which used by teachers attach no importance to pronunciation.

However, in the direct approach, pronunciation is considered important. In addition, Jack and William (2002) reported that pronunciation is no longer considered as an indispensable aspect in a foreign language teaching.

According to Beebe (1984, 51), " Most current textbooks in English as a second language either ignore the teaching of pronunciation or rely primarily on old stand-bys-to teach non-native learners to pronounce English accurately". Trammell (1993) also indicates that instruction in pronunciation has been deemphasised due to the new teaching methods like the Communicative Approach.

Communication is an important need of in daily life and it should be the primary purpose of language learning and teaching . Therefore, teaching English speaking to non-native students of English how to speak English accurately and fluently with native speakers of English is one of the general objectives of the foreign language teaching. According to Yule (2006: 33)," language is primarily speech and it is more basic to language than the written form". Knowles (1987) argue that written language is permanent and looks imperfect version of the spoken language whereas spoken Language is more elusive. It is clear that we all speak and hear the sounds spoken in our environment first before we write or read. For instance, child before goes to

school, he will speak before write because he will acquire his first Language from his family when he imitates what they said.

It is seem that as long as one can communicate with others in the second language, everything is fine but the questions is , how can communicate with people fluently if your pronunciation is incorrect?

Beebe (1984) insists that pronunciation always affect what we communicate and how well we communicate it, and therefore it should be take seriously.

Weeren& Theunissen(1987: 109) pointed out:

“ Firstly, good pronunciation allows one to be better understood. It gives the speaker’s oral production a certain redundancy. And this can help to get a message across more effectively as a learning objective because of it is high pay off. The number of sound, sound clusters and intonation pattern in a Language is finite, as is the alphabet. Once the system has been mastered, it can be used, thus giving it fundamentally an infinite scope. Thirdly, a deviant pronunciation means that one is immediately ‘ marked’ as non-native abroad”.

Harmer (2007) suggests that if students want to be able to speak fluently in English, they need to be able pronounce phonemes correctly and appropriate stress and intonation. Pronunciations of students need to be good enough to communicate the message so that it is understood by other speakers of English. Therefore, most Asian adult students have difficulties to pronounce words or sentences correctly which can be a major cause of

misunderstandings. They have difficulties in recognize sound of English,

word stress(which part of a word are more heavily stressed that is spoken
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louder and longer), sentence stress(which part of a sentence can be more heavily stressed), sounds in connected speech(how to link the sounds together in a sentence), and finally in intonation(how our voice rises and falls at a certain point of the sentence). From my own experience as a teacher in a secondary school, most students have potential pronunciation problems when they speak English. They have problem with stress and intonation that they unable to put the right emphasis on the right part of the word. Also they have problems with vowels bends and consonants blends as well. For example, sounds like" ea" and " ou" can be confusing them because when they listen to the audio recordings, it can be very difficult for them to pick up the subtle blends of two or more vowels. Additionally, In consonants blends, they have problem with " th" sound because they are not accustomed to putting " t" and " h" together to form " th" sound to reproduce.

It is clear that pronunciation is so difficult to learn. The first language of most overseas students effect on learning the second language.

Problems that face Asian students in English pronunciation:

Most Asian adult students work and study hard to become very fluent in English. However, there are many different varieties of spoken English and non-native students may have achieved fluency such as knowing correct grammar and knowing a large numbers of vocabulary especially when they have been taught by non-native speakers but they have a non-standard accent which make the use of English difficult for native speakers of English to understand.

Vowels

Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) states there are different types of vowel sounds in English pronunciation. Firstly, received pronunciation. It has twelve monophthongs (single or pure vowels). Secondly, eight diphthongs (double vowels) and two triphthongs (triple vowels). therefore, some of in Asian students like Arabics , Japanese and Chinese have fewer vowels in their first Language which lead to have problems with hearing and pronouncing these distinctions of vowel sounds. For example, Japanese language has only 5 vowels /i/,/e/,/a/,/É'/,/o/.

According to, Kenworthy(1987) there are five vowels letters which are (a, e, i, o, u) . They map to 13 different sounds. For instance, the letter" is pronounced differently in the words: boat, boot, out and hot. This is one of the problems that encountered by Asian adult students in pronunciation subject. They have problem with the /a/ sound (e. g. at) because it is not easy for them to hear and pronounce this sound. Also, they could not differentiate between the long sound/a/ and the sound/e/ (e. g. paper-pepper). They also have problems in differentiating between the long/e/ and the short /i/ (e. g. eat-it).

Furthermore, diphthongs in English are difficult to learn and definitely tribal markers in English. . They are also very easy for native speakers of English to identify but not easy for non-native speakers of English. So, speech sounds which involve a slide from one vowel to another is the biggest problem which face Asian adult students when they speak English. For example, the" ou" sound in the word " out" is a blend of /ah/ and /oo/.

Several of diphthongs are quiet subtle . For instant the long /ee/ sound in the <https://assignbuster.com/problems-faced-by-asian-students-in-english-pronunciation/>

words “ feel” and “ fear” is a blend of /ee/ and /ah/ as (fee-ah). Celce-Murcia , Brinton and Goodwin (1996)

Consonants

Kota(2006) stats that English consonants are less difficult than vowels. Most languages have the sounds which are represented by the letters” d, t, s, and z” . Nevertheless, some languages do not use certain consonants which can be difficult for non-native speakers of English. For examples, the “ r” and “ l” sounds are not used by Japanese and Korean native speakers. Then, the so-called “ ra-la distinction” is especially difficult for them. They have also difficulty to distinguish between /b/ and /v/ sounds. The /th/ sound is not simply to use it in the native language. It can be difficult for Vietnamese students. Therefore, they substitute a /zh/ instead of /th/ as in:

/zh/ese problems may be caused by pollution.

Also, he adds that there are more consonants in English than in Japanese language . Therefore, the /f/, /v/ /o/, /ʌ/, /s/, /ʒ/, /ts/, /dʒ/ do not exist in the Japanese consonantal system.

In addition, Munro((1993) states that some Arabic language do not make use of separate sounds for /b/ and/p/. then, they have difficulty to distinguishing and pronouncing “ b” and “ p” sounds as in : do not bark while I park the van. The difference is quite subtle. They may confuse “ z” with” j” . These problems cause misunderstanding by native English speakers when they communicate with each other

From my own experience as a Libyan student at Leicester University in the UK, I had a car accident in university road because the weather was slippery and snowing which cause that the brake of my car was out of the control. After that the police came to me and asked me some questions about the accident. I said to him " I feel slippery". The problem here, the police wrote in the report " driver feel asleep" but he did not write what I said " I feel slippery" . I think that was a misunderstanding between the police and me because of my language. He misunderstand me because of his linguistic constraints particularly his heavily -accented English.

Other problems which face Asian adult students, is dropping medial consonants. Some of them tend to drop medial consonants such as, sounds /p/ and /k/ from the middle of polysyllabic words. For example, Chinese students tend to drop the difficult " c" from the word of " success". They say/ suh'sess/. Also, some native speaker of English pronounce the word " accessory" as/ assess or ee/ instead of

/ ack-sess-or-ee/.(Dalton, 1994)

Syllable structure:

According to Joanna & Heather (2003), English allows for in syllable structure a cluster of up to three consonants before the vowel and four consonants after the vowel as in the words straw and glimpsed. Therefore, the structure of syllabus cause issues for speakers of many languages. For instance, Japanese students usually try to insert a vowel between the consonants (e. g. desk-/desks/) becomes " desukusu" or in the word " milk shake" / mlIk Êfelk/ becomes " mirukushÊtku". Kota(2006) there are two types of syllable in

English which are open syllables(CV) and closed syllables(CCCVCC). On the other hand, Japanese only permit one type of syllable which is open syllable. For example,

Word meaning syllable

Ke hair CV

Kare boyfriend CVCV

So, Words in Japanese do not end with consonants and it Japanese does not allow both initial and final consonants.

Knowles (1987) maintains that some Asian students whose first languages end in vowels, they often tend to make all English words end in vowels. For example, they pronounce the word “ make” as /melkÉ™ / instead of / melk/. Also, they sometimes find it is so complicated when native speakers of English may drop consonants in the more complex blends (e. g. the word “ months”, they say /mÉ...nÉµs/ instead of / mÉ...nos/.

Rhythm and Cadence:

Brown (2001: 121) pointed out that “ cadence is the pattern of stresses within a sentence and rhythm refers to the “ beat” syllabus. If each one were marked by tapping fingers on a desk: rat a-tat-tat-tat TAT of this”. He adds that the main issue that trips up Asian adult students that British English are stress timed whereas most Asian languages are syllable timed. Stressed syllables are roughly equidistant in time and they like the sound of the mechanical tat-tat-tat-tat of gun machine with equal length to each syllable. However, native English speakers stretch syllables at the same time like

putting emphasis on some syllables and not others. For instance, " hi. Wonderful to see u again" . They say this sentence like this " hiiii woood' fl to seeeeee yu a'gaiainn". This mean, " won- see- gain" is both emphasized and lengthened but other syllabuses in the sentence are so lightly and shortened spoken.

According to Kota (2006), stress time in English is one of the problem that encounter Asian students particularly for Singaporeans students. They speak in the way which is very difficult for English speakers to understand.

Intonation

Roach, (2002: 50) defines intonation as " the rising or falling pitch of the voice while pronouncing words or syllables". He believes that intonation enables speakers to express their emotions and attitudes when they speak. The most problematic area of pronunciation for most Asian students is intonation. They find it extremely difficult to hear " tunes" or identify the different patterns of rising and falling tones. Therefore, some Asian languages have less pitch variation than English especially Japanese language. They use pith changes to mark stress on the word level which result the so-called " monotonous" intonation. Wong(1987) suggests that English as a tonal language(not using tones). We can understand the words in isolation but if we put them together in sentences, the meaning of the sentence may change by a shift in tone. For example, " Are you going to the library?(low-then-high on word library) but if u wondered which of two persons agreed to get the list of books, the same words would have a different emphasis " Are you going to the library?", and the tone for " you" would be rather " deep" which is different from the first question.

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Jack and Willy (2002) introduce other problems in English pronunciation . Firstly, difference between spelling and sounds. There are lots of words in English language which have silent letters. Therefore, most Asian students specifically Pakistani students pronounce these silent letters unknowingly which make them mispronounce

the words. For example, knowledge, kneel . These two word have “ k” silent letter which they should not pronounce it at all. Secondly, multiple sounds of the same letters are also one of the issues that encounter Asian adult students. This mean there are many letters and combinations of letters which produce numerous sounds at different place. For instance, the letter “ c” produces two sounds like “ s” and “ k” (e. g. circle, car) and also “ ch” letter produce three sounds as “ ch”, “ k” and “ sh”.

Factors affecting the English pronunciation of Asian students:

The effect of native language:

Every language in the world has different accent and varsities is true that non native speakers speak the target language in a different way.

Sometimes, they speak highly different than native speakers of English do.

Avery& Ehrlich (1987: 9) calls the foreign accent “ the nature of which is determined to a large extended by a learners’ native language. Then, native language of speaker may influence on the pronunciation of the target language. Jack and Willy(2002: 184) states that” the way we speak is a part of our identity , that is, phonemic differences between language cause, a target language which will be spoken with a foreign language”. Some Asian students specifically Turkish adult students have difficulty in some English

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sounds or words that are not exist in their first language. For example, the sounds / ʃ / and / ʒ / are not exist in Turkish language which lead Turkish students to face difficulty to pronounce these sounds when they speak English. So they produce these sounds under the influence of their first language. Then, the influence of native language is inevitable.

The factor of age:

This is the most important factor in learning English pronunciation. If someone wants to pronounce a foreign language with a native like accent, he/she should start to learn it during his/her childhood. For example, children who start learn English language in foreign language speaking people environment. As a result, they have more advantage than the children who learn the second language in

their motherlands. Krashen (1988) mentions that people who expose their second language during childhood, they achieve higher foreign language proficiency than those who beginning as adults. It seems that age is the main factor which effect on adults English pronunciation. They are difficult for them to learn English language after puberty. Therefore, it is better to learning it in short run and should be started in puberty.

Phonetic Ability:

According to Jack and Willy (2002) pointed out that some people who have a good ear, they have the ability to discriminate between the two sounds accurately. So, learners' phonetics ability affects the development of their pronunciation. Kenworthy(1987) believes that the influence of age is an efficient factor for phonetics ability. Because it is so difficult for adult

students to have more ability in pronunciation than immigrants children who start their learning process in a second language speaking environment.

The Amount Exposure:

Many non native speakers have not opportunity to practice the English language in their motherlands. English also do not only used in the classroom. If the learners live in an English- speaking country, the learners will have opportunities to listen and speak with native speakers of English. Conversely, there will no advantage for learners if they live in a non English speaking country. Kenworthy (1987) insists that exposure can be a contributory factor but it is not necessary factor for developing adult learners' pronunciation. Learners should make use of it is opportunities, if they are aware of the necessity of being exposed to the second language. If the learners do that, they will be more successful in case of improving their pronunciation.

Personality and Attitude

This factor affect the pronunciation of most Asian adult students in a bad way if the learners have negative attitudes for the English environment . learners or they are introverted students. From my own experience as a student in the UK, I am one of the students who are introverted or shy. Therefore, I usually do not take part in classroom activities; seminars and tutorials . Whereas extrovert students have more chance to improve their pronunciation. Brown (2001) states attitude of the students toward the new language have an effective role in pronunciation learning. Also, if the learners have a good attitude for the target culture, they can develop their pronunciation accurately. If the learners have some prejudices on the second

language and its society, this event will influence their approach to the language.

It is clear that these above factors are effective in the learners' pronunciation and also exert much influence on the adult learners. So, teachers play a significant role for helping adult learners to develop their English pronunciation. Also, they should pay attention to the students' concern for pronunciation because they are not aware of the way that they speech. Therefore there are lots of methods and types of teaching English pronunciation which help Asian adult students to overcome the difficulties of it. They will also help them to acquire an accurate pronunciation and improve their speech.

Solutions to surmount the difficulties of mispronunciation among Asian adult students:-

Teaching pronunciation:-

Jigsaw:

Pennington (1996) maintains that jigsaw is a form of information gap.

Students work in pairs or small group to exchange their information. They try to combine words with each other to create sentences. These sentences consist of words that the learners have difficulty to pronounce these words. For example, in the word " rise" which has the letters " s" that they must pronounce it as " z" and producing /ralz/ e. g. I was surprised that the raisings rise!

B-Tongue Twister:

This kind of activity helps adult Asian students to say difficult words and phrases so quickly. Celce-Murcia (1987: 55) stress that “ there is a little transfer from practice to natural information. But, if it is needed and necessary, they can be used”.

Example: Paul piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

2-Drilling Techniques

There are lots of drills which helps adult Asian students to improve their English pronunciation. They are very useful for teaching the correct pronunciation of the words and sentences.

A- Saturation drill

Wong (1987) proposed it is vey suitable for all position of the problematic sound. For instance, the sound /s/ as a problem sound. It can be drilled in its three positions

Initial media final

See leasing peace

Seem clinic purse

Substitution drill

Dalton (1994) says that this drill can be applied by substituting any sound instead of other sound. For instance, /t/ sound instead of /t̃/ and /d/ in place of /d̃/ (e. g. this is thin/tin.)

It is clear that there are other ways helps learners to overcome difficulties of pronunciation . First, media which give to the students positive advantage especially when they watch standard English news channel like BBC. Second, is practice. Students should practise English with native speaker or non native speakers of English to improve their English speaking

Conclusion:

To sum up, teaching pronunciation is one of the important areas of foreign language teaching. Most overseas students especially Asian adult students encounter troubles when they try to communicate with native speakers of English. Then, communication should be the primary purpose of language learning and teaching. One crucial part of effective communication for Asian adult students to grasp is: comfortably intelligible pronunciation. They have certain difficulties such as produce correct sound and recognition of English sounds, understanding of stress and intonation, difference between spelling and sounds and other problems. Therefore, it should be studied in the early age (from puberty) to eliminate these problems and also to overcome the negative influence from the first language interference. Teachers must be a ware of the techniques which help students improve their pronunciation according to their age, ability, needs, attitudes and expectations.

Count words (3200)

Classroom Implications:

Appendix I:

Generally, pronunciation is really complicated process in foreign language teaching. There are some of sounds which have similar sounds but have

different meanings. This can be causing much confusion to the learners. Therefore, most ESL students have problem with English pronunciation when they speak English. From my own experience as a teacher in Libyan secondary school, I used several ways to teach pronunciation which can be benefit all learners. Firstly, introducing phonemes . because the biggest problem that faces them is the distinguishage between sounds. For example, in the words" fat, mat, cat, sat", the letters /f/, /m/, /c/, /s/ are the phonemes which are the beginning letters of these words. Phoneme makes the distinct difference between similar words. After that, students listen and repeat these different sounds and then identify them. For the best result, I introduce phoneme in pairs. (e. g. the /f/ and/v/ sounds). They listen and speak them and also repeat simple words like(fat-vat)Secondly, practicing phonemes for making the sound accurately. I drew pronunciation diagrams on the blackboard because they help them to know how to hold the tongue and lips. For example, the sound /th/ in #the word " this" and " thank".

Anxiety is usually common among students when they lean pronunciation. Then, I usually use some verbal games such as, handclap rhythms and jazz charts which can help them to improve their speaking and relieve much of pressure.

Appendix II:

Students listen to audio recordings and they practice what they hear because recordings get them attuned to stress, intonation, pitch and phonological distinctions. For example:

Listen and say what word you hear: is it from column (a) or column (b)?

Some words are unusual.

Appendix III

Word stress and intonation

Listen and mark the stressed syllable.

Daughter- orbit-planet- computer- meaning- handle-homework- hospital -
derision.

2-Read these sentences and mark the pauses with " / " and mark the intonation pattern with " â†' " and " â†"".

1. People who look different from others in some way are interesting.
2. The one who looks bored is my sister.
3. The latest design, with CD player is very expensive.
4. A tidy, conventionally decorated room with everything in its place is boring.