Teaching pronunciation essay sample

Globalization has given English, an international platform. Today English is the most accessible language. Almost all communications find expression in English. Today English has given universality and flexibility to higher education. National commerce, judiciary all are carried out in English. It is for this reason that more and more students are taking up learning English as second language. Knowledge of English paves the way for further studies taking up jobs in Multinational companies, improves the prospect of advanced studies and Global travel. These future prospects and advantages lure more and more students to opt for study of English as their second language. Yet while learning and speaking the language, there are various factors which govern the learning pace and quality. They are related to the native language of the speaker, age of the student, his or her attitude towards the language, motivation of learning the language, his or her cultural background. Each of these plays an important role in the learning of second language.

In learning a language pronunciation forms an integral part of the language. To speak the language pronouncing the word correctly is very important. In this essay as we deal with teaching pronunciation to the secondary school students, who speak Arabic as their native language, we need to certain facts about these students. The students in secondary level in schools have reached puberty and are recognized as adolescents. Their morphological and intellectual growth is accelerated at this age and they are at a turning point. They acquire a language faster and more easily than the adults. Age has an effect on second language learning. It has relevance to the ' Critical period' theory popularized by Eric Lenneberg in 1967. It argues that full language

acquisition is impossible beyond a certain age. It says that children have neurological advantage in learning languages and puberty gives a turning point to the ability. The brain loses its plasticity after a certain age, losing its ability to adapt and reorganize. This makes language learning a difficult task. These students in their secondary level have begun their exposure to the language in early childhood and become more proficient in the use of language than the adults, who start late acquisition. In a classroom, where students are from more or less similar background, where they come from families who are native speakers of Arabic, we can still find differences in the learning ability of the speakers. While some speak English without any accent, most speak with an Arabic accent and may be distinguished from the rest.

In such a context it is important that we take into consideration certain factors which influence the pronunciation and learning abilities of these students.

Agehas an effect on learning English as the 2 [nd] language. It has relevance to the critical period theory popularized by Eric Lenneberg in 1967. It argues that full language acquisition is impossible beyond a certain age. It says that children have a neurological advantage in learning language and puberty gives a turning point to the ability. The brain loses its plasticity after a certain age, losing its ability to adapt and reorganize. Thus it makes language learning a difficult task.

Language Aptitude-Determining Language aptitude in a classroom is extremely effective in predicting successful learners. As aptitude is largely unchangeable, it is important that students be tested.

Strategiesused in learning may be different for learners from different culture. There are differences in the strategies used by male and female learners. It has been observed in various studies that females enjoy learning language more than males and employ strategies widely and intensively.

Personality Factors-Studies have shown that personality factors like extroverts and introverts play an important role in learning a non native language. Extroverts acquire a second language better than introverts, as they are willing to communicate even if they are not sure of success.

Motivationof the students plays a key role in learning second language. Motivation may be intrinsic, i. e., desire to learn for an internal reward, or extrinsic reward for high grades or praise. It has often been seen, that intrinsic motivation leads to better learning, more effective and long term learning.

Abilityof the learner to learn target language is the competence of the person, which means knowledge of the learner of the language rules.

Strategies of Learning English as Second Language

Every language has its own phonetics, its own rules, different stress and intonation. Often English as second language is mispronounced due to the sound, rules and stress of intonation of native languages. It was pointed out

by Avery & Ehrlich (1992) that the sound system of the native languages can influence pronunciation of English in three ways.

1. When a learner faces a new sound in English which he or she is not familiar with in his native language, the muscles used for pronunciation not being used before, may not be produced correctly.

2. Often in native language the rules to combine sounds to words are different from that of English, where same sound is produced, with different rules; it may cause a problem in pronouncing the words.

3. Often the learner may transfer the melody and rhythm used in native language to English, thus causing faulty pronunciation.

A student may hear a word in English in the same way as he or she hears his or her native language. He or she hears the sounds of his or her mother tongue instead of the actual sound of the word given by his or her teacher. Thus interference of the native language is referred to as ' negative transfer' by Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin (1996, p. 20.) It said:

Today most researchers in the field, while minimizing the role that native language interference plays in other areas of language acquisitions, would agree that interference(now more commonly referred to as negative transfer) is valid in second language pronunciation acquisition.

Marzouk , (1993) understands that the individual's past experience in native language plays an important role in learning second language, especially in adolescent years. Since first language plays an important part for accents in second language, it is important for ESL teachers to have a detailed knowledge of the first language . This knowledge will help the teacher

identify the patterns from the first language influencing the learner. Accordingly student groups may be formed, so that instructors can prepare the methodology of instruction according to the need of the group.

Studies made by scholars show that there is considerable influence of mother tongue in learning the second language.

Altaha (1995, p110) in his study of the common problems faced by Arabic students

Learning English as their second language found that very little research is available

Regarding pronunciation problems faced by the Arabs in learning English. He carried out a study on a group of Saudi students who had never left their country and had started

Learning English from the age of thirteen. His students had taken courses in reading,

Writing, conversation, grammar and phonetics He found that they were facing problems

Regarding use of some pairs of consonant sounds. They were/tf/ and / ʃ / as in " chair"

" Share", /v/ and /f/ as in " van" and " fan;" /p/ and /b/ as in " pat" and " bat"; consonant clusters (i. e. " grandfather" often mispronounced "

grandifather") consonant doubling (i. e." allow" often mispronounced " al-low").

Kharma & Hajjaj (1989) identified the pronunciation problems of the Arabs, by Collecting data in an oral interview. It was identified that the mispronunciation were related to use of consonants, vowels and stress in the words. The consonants /p/, /v/,

/ŋ/, /θ/, /ð/, /r/, /l/, was identified problematic by the Arabs.

The Australian Government (1978) in an article corroborates findings similar to Altaha's

Except for two extra consonants /gl/, and/dʒ/.

Avery & Ehrlich (1992) in their book about teaching American English Pronunciation to select groups found that Arabic speakers had difficulty in pronouncing certain English consonants. These consonant clusters were same as that found by Altaha. Avery & Ehrlich (1992) found that the difficulties were not related to a particular age group but to Arabic learners in general.

Anna Marina of Eberly College of Arts and Science, West Virginia University, U. S. A, conducted a study to analyze the pronunciation difficulties faced by Arabic speakers in English consonants. Objective of her study was to identify the persistent difficulties in pronunciation of the Arabic learners, who had mingled in the culture of the target language for four years or more. This study differed from earlier studies made by Altaha (1995), Kharma Hajjaj

(1989) and Avery & Ehrlich (1992) as their participants were mainly natives of Arabic countries and never experienced being immersed in the target language. Anna Maria's participants were motivated to speak like native speakers, losing non-native pronunciation . The participants were adults who had to undergo interview sessions, sentence reading, minimal pairs reading . During these sessions, it was observed that mispronunciation of words related to constant phonemes due to foreign accent leading to misinterpretation of meanings by the listeners, who were mainly native speakers of English.

It was found that interference of the mother tongue or Language 1 was the main factor contributing to it. The consonants that were identified as problematic were the same as that found by other researchers. Four out of eight problematic consonant sounds were /ŋ/ as in buying. [bayɪŋ], /ɫ/ as in civil [sɪvɪɫ], /d/ as in" bed" [bɛd], /r/ (/ɹ/) as in . risk [ɹɪsk].

The consonant that were identified as problematic were /p/ as in play [pley] and /v/ as in " five" [fayv]. The consonants /p/ and /v/ are not present in the Standard Arabic Phonetic system. So the Arabic speakers substitute /b/ for /p/ and /f/ for /v/. This substitution to nearest sound is likely to produce foreign accent and lead to mispronunciation and misinterpretation by native speakers of English.

This study brings home the fact that attaining native like pronunciation after adolescence is very difficult and a goal hardly reached. It is in-fact a revelation and a lesson for ESL teachers, who need to attune their teaching methodology and skills according to students needs.

Having understood the background of learning English as second language, we will now

Deal with the strategies involved in teaching pronunciation to secondary school students

In Saudi Arabia. Pronunciation forms the key to language learning. Without proper pronunciation conversation is likely to get limited. School students who start learning English at an early age develop better pronunciation. Older students who start late find it difficult to adapt to new language pronunciations. To speak a language the main aim of the learner is to achieve intelligibility, i. e to speak the language meaningfully, to be understood. This may be achieved on applying proper stress, rhythm and intonation to the language.

Learning of English for these Arabic speaking students is no easy task. There are many sounds in English that a native (Arab) is not familiar with, as those sounds are absent in Arabic. So it is important that the students are exposed to the sound system of the second language, i. e. English. A range of tasks may be so set that the learner is exposed to the same group of sound, until he has mastery over it. Activities relating to these should be repeated often, so that the ear and the speech get training on the sound. These activities should be very much related to the contexts that are taught in the class. It helps in better assimilation.

For beginners word stress (i. e. the pattern of stressed syllables in words) and intonation (the rising and falling levels of pitch) used in utterances are of

extreme importance. Use of stress and intonation not only helps improve listening skills, but also adds to the meaning of the word. For beginners, practice of listening to native speaker, who speaks with intonation, will foster learning the word more correctly. Advanced learners, however, already adept in intonation of the syllables and words, will need to tune in to the meanings exposed by intonation.

It is important for ESL teachers to follow certain guidelines, while taking classes for these adolescents' native Arabic students learning English. In a classroom, it becomes important for the learners to know what the teacher is focusing at. When the teacher is focusing on the pronunciation the learners too should be aware of it, as it will facilitate learning. When the attention of the teacher shifts to meaning, the class should be adequately motivated and alerted to comprehend the change. If the two topics are differentiated and dealt as different segments of teaching, it will not create confusion in learning; instead it will facilitate accuracy of learning.

In a class some students may be weak in identifying a group of new sounds. They should be made to practice these whenever the teacher finds an opportunity to do so.

The key features of the language like rhythm, intonation in a word or sentence should be made familiar to the students. It is possible that such features are absent in his native language.

Topics or contents that provide for listening skills need to be practiced, so that an ear for the sound is developed. It needs to be related to the

classroom teaching. Competent ESL teachers may use the transcripts of native speaker interactions to promote activities that deal with key aspects of his pronunciation.

Integration of curriculum with various aspects of learning is needed. It facilitates freedom of the student to practice with in the contents of his syllabus, make expressions and seek clarification wherever needed. Often some students are weaker than average students in a class and need special classes or tutoring in a learning centre or in a group. It is important to slow down the pace of tutoring to the level of the learner and catch up with him.

Ghaleeb Rababah and Paul Seedhouse made a study on a sample group of learners to learn about the relationship between communicative strategies used by second language learners and their ability to transmit comprehensible messages to the listeners. The students were 30 in number, English majors at Yarmouk University, Jordan, studying English as second language for more than 9 years. They were given three tasks of communication: picture story telling, object identification and role play.

In object identification, various pictures of objects from every day life were taken. The students were asked to name and describe them. They could first do it in their native language and then use second language to communicate them. Picture story telling showed the story of an accident in 6 pictures. The learners were asked to tell the story as if it was related to them. It served the purpose of narrating everyday incidents of life. Role play task involved learner A, who acted as a foreigner and learner B was to act as an old native of the city (say London). The native learner B was to solve the problems of

the learner A, guiding him to solve his problems. The purpose was to measure the comprehension of messages exchanged.

The implications of the study concluded that making use of effective communication strategies such as literal translation, circumlocution, code switching helped them pass comprehensible messages. Even weak learners were able to do so. The success ratio of the message comprehension is directly related to the proficiency of the student.

The teacher's role is to familiarize the learners with communication strategies and motivate them to take risks and not be afraid of making errors. Use of communicative strategies is useful in compensating the lack of linguistic knowledge thus helping even weak learners to transmit messages successfully.

Practical Aspects of Teaching Pronunciation

In this Essay we aim at teaching English Pronunciation to Secondary School Student of Age group 14 years and above. Most of these Saudi students are introduced to English in Middle School. It is therefore understood they do not have exposure to English for many years.

English and Arabic

English and Arabic are two languages which vary extensively. The variation is not only in the sound used, but also in the relative importance of vowels and consonants expressing their meanings. English has 22 vowels and diphthongs to 24 consonants, while Arabic has 8 vowels and diphthongs to

32 consonants. English has far more consonant clusters than Arabic. Arabic does not have corresponding consonant equivalent to pr, pl, gr, thr, thw, sp. Three segment clusters being absolutely absent in Arabic like spr, skr, str, spl. In such a situation Arabic speakers when speaking English tend to insert short vowels to assist pronunciation.

' perice' or ' pirice' for price

' ispring' or ' sipring' for spring

' arrangid' for arranged.

Since Arabic language is simple and virtually phonetic and their letters stand for their sounds, Arabic speakers try to speak English using the same phonetic methods,

' istobbid' in Arab tongue for ' stopped '(as the sound ' p' does not exist in Arabic).

Pronunciation using stress

In contrast to English, Arabic word stress, is regular and predictable. Stress can alter the meaning completely as in con'vict(verb) and ' convict (noun). Often Arabic words spelled identically, mean completely different things.

Phrase and sentence rhythm, being similar in both Arabic and English, cause few problems. In Arabic, primary stress occurs more frequently while unstressed syllables are pronounced more clearly. When Arab speakers use rising tones, rather than structural markers for a question, this practice is

often carried over to spoken English. The intonation of the Arabic speakers to a low fall, at the end of phrases , set it to a different rhythm and intonation from normal speech. This may produce a very unnatural recitation, different and distinct from everyday speech.

The grammar structure of Arabic, is very different from that of English and it influences the speakers. It is for this reason that Arabic speakers find it difficult to grasp English nouns, verbs and adjectives, which follow no definite pattern. The handling of the students by the teachers aid the learning, depending on the approach or strategies undertaken to teach.

In such a context it is imperative that, certain guidelines be laid down by the ESL teachers to the students concerning pronunciation. Good pronunciation comes from stressing the right words. It is because English is a time-stressed language. Many other languages are considered syllabic. English focuses on specific stressed words and glides over non stressed words.

Stressed words are content words, e. g nouns – kitchen, Cargo, Peter.

Verbs as -visit, go, come, Adjectives as – beautiful, stupid, new. Non-stressed words are function words like auxiliary verbs e. g. am, were, Prepositions-of, before, and Conjunctions- but, Pronouns- they, she . A student may be given some sentences to read.

1. The Earth is a beautiful planet to live.
2. She came for her guitar class even on a holiday.
3. Abdul won the prize in school drama.
4. Take great care of your health.

The first task to be done is to underline the stressed words. Next, on reading aloud the focus should be on stressed words and glide over the non-stressed words. By focusing on stressed words, non-stressed words and syllables are often ' swallowed' in English. It is also important not to focus on pronouncing each word.

Classroom activities to Enhance Pronunciation

For a new learner of English following the pronunciation chart is very useful. But for thesecondary school studentswho are already familiar with these sounds, it is important that the fine tuning of the pronunciation skills be done. The class may be introduced to the variations in the vowel sound. A list of sound of vowels given, when recited clarifies the difference in usage of the vowel

1. Pea – Tin
2. Took – To
3. Door – Goat
4. Egg – Mat – Pup
5. Lock – Boat

Repetition of each of these words gives the practice on the language as well as teaches

the students to differentiate the sounds. The ESL teacher may introduce students to the 26 letters of English alphabet that produce 44 sounds in the language, which indicates that the number of sounds in a word may be more or less than the number of letters. Activities introduced in a classroom that may start with improving the vocabulary with –

1. Homophone quizzes: In this case two words having same sound and same spelling is taken, which have different meaning.

2. Food storage Vocabulary Quiz- The quiz focuses on different food storage containers and different measurements of food.

3. Math Vocabulary Quiz – provides math vocabulary for basic calculations.

4. Visual Dictionaries made especially for ESL students. It provides visual images for different profession and the words related to it.

5. Body word Groups vocabulary provides words related different parts of the body.

6. Vocabulary list for Adjectives, Action verbs is made as a part of Classroom Activity.

Language Labshave been successful in Promotion of oral translations from Arabic to English. The learners have to work individually in the traditional language laboratory. The result showed that simultaneous interpretation from Arabic to English improves the performance of the learner significantly.

Story Telling: Listening to a read aloud story with a preview of background and revising the important points in mother tongue, promoted high developmental scores in vocabulary.

A thousand words picture dictionary isfull in colour and offers the corresponding pages for vocabulary or pronunciation. Reinforcement activities suitable for classroom or home use are given on adjoining pages. These have clear simple instructions and up-to-date art and graphics

explaining more than thousand words. The chapters cover all aspects of daily life, making students familiar with every day used words.

InVocabulary Acquisitionrepeated exposure to new lexical items using a variety of means helps in memorizing the new words. Introducing the learners to adaptable aids of verbal, visual, tactile memory aids helps in the improvement of the ability to recall words. Since individual students have his or her own learning styles it is important that they be given a wide array of strategies to choose from. It boosts their awareness of individual learning styles making them confident and autonomous learners.

Secondary level students may also beread short storiesin the classroom. Post reading feedback from the students may be gathered through , verbal self reporting or post reading analysis of sense making communication, reflexivity and re-contextualization.

Improving the Vocabulary Knowledge and Reading Attitude of the Students

The problem of poor reading comprehension and lack of vocabulary knowledge collected through standard test scores and teacher's assessment showed that the students lack exposure and knowledge of vocabulary and strategies for learning new words. It also showed that they need ample time for free reading and read aloud sessions. To tackle the problem the teacher spent more time in read aloud activities and the students also spent more time in individual silent reading. The result indicated a steady growth in vocabulary of the students.

Secondary Students of Schools in Saudi Arabia are mostly taught English from Middle School. Since they are more or less new to the language they need special guidance under ESL teachers to achieve their target language, second language. Arabic has a standard pronunciation used basically to read Quran. It is for this reason that native speakers of the language find it very difficult to learn to pronounce English correctly. Yet without English, which is now an international language it is very difficult for modern students to stay connected with the outside world. A reporter from a newspaper in Saudi Arabia, Intisar Al –Yamani in 2002 writes " Avoiding a language that provides career opportunities in future and is in itself a source of knowledge in all subjects not only encourages ignorance but is a danger to our society at large."

Significance of teaching and learning English as second language holds immense possibilities for the youth of the country. Therefore importance of learning it can never be undermined.

Difficulties Faced In Learning Second Language

The degree of difficulty the learners experience in learning second language depends on the complexity and difference of the native language from the target language. Often the errors produced are of syntax and pronunciation due to interference of the native language also known as L1 transfer. The interdentals, common in English (the sound th) like thin, thing, the, this, that etc are relatively rare in other languages. It is substituted with[t] or[d] by the speakers of other language. English has more number of vowel sounds, twelve mono, eight diphthongs and two diphthongs . Arabic speakers have

lesser number of vowels , that too pure ones only. So they have problems pronouncing these distinctions. Learners of second language often over pronounce unstressed vowels leading to an unnatural rhythm in pronunciation. English is a stress-timed language in which the stress is laid at uniform distances. Arabic uses phonetics based on its syllables, so the natives do not have any idea of timing the stress in the new language. There are many tenses in English with subtle differences, which a new learner finds difficult to learn.

Error Analysis and Correction

S. P. Corder in 1970 established the field of Error Analysis . Most of the problems faced by learners was due to wrong inferences made about the rules. It has been observed that errors are systematic, while mistakes are not so. Errors may be omissive, additive or substitutive. In language level errors may be phonological errors, vocabulary errors, lexical errors and syntactic errors. The degree of these errors depends on the degree of interference with the communication. Global errors make words or utterances difficult to understand. By analysing the error, learners speaking and writing can be dealt with effectively but the listening and reading errors cannot be handled. It is for this reason and the avoidance strategies of the learner that these error analysis methods are still under consideration.

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