# LITERARY QUEST

## Poor English Pronunciation among ESL Students in Indian Colleges: An Analysis

**Mr. S.R. Satheesh Kumar**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, RVS Technical Campus, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

## Abstract

This study shows the incidence of poor English pronunciation among ESL students in Indian colleges which is an embarrassing situation and it has defied variety of solutions. In recent times however, research and deep rooted studies in linguistics have shown that many Indian universities have come to the rescue. This paper finds out the important causes of poor English pronunciation and the problems associated with this problem. The desired results can be achieved by the approaches to the pronunciation issues with the ability of the digital age. This paper discusses the latest advancements of various digital age techniques that are used to fight poor English pronunciation among Indian students.

## Keywords

ESL Students; Deep Rooted; Pronunciation; Advancements.

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**Introduction**

English is the second largest spoken language in the world. It is spoken in almost all the countries of the world. It is not only a universal language but also a link language. It connects continents, countries and states. English is the official language of India. Besides the languages of Indian origin, English has reached the important place in Indians' personal life and professional growth. English has become a common platform for many Indians. This is also the language of instruction in all the universities and colleges across the country. English language is the best studied and most sought after language in the world. "Effective communication processes among users of the language must be achieved by maintaining the morphology, syntax, semantics and phonological ideals of the language (Jackson)". Anything short of the above said will stall the effective use of the language and strongly affect the competence and performance of the user. This, obviously, will make mutual intelligibility difficult for all involved in the use of the language. It is important to note that all aspects of the language are very useful and important. Grammatically acceptable syntactic structures are very important as it is the final part of the language use where communication between hearer and speaker takes place. "Misapplication of the rules governing the sound system of any language, particularly, the English language, will negate the very essence of communication and mutual intelligibility (Schane )". This study intends not only to show the problems of poor English pronunciation among Indian students but also the solutions for it.

**Indian Students and English Language**

English is India's official mode of communication. Students in almost all parts of India have to use English language for communication and learning. The English language is not very easy to the Indian student who has to learn under challenging circumstances due to mother tongue influence, teacher induced errors, lack of interest in language learning and so many other factors.

Each and every class consists of students from different board of studies and examination, different syllabi, lack of mutual interest in learning among students etc. play vital roles in deciding one's pronunciation. The first major cause of poor pronunciation among Indian students is the environmental factor. The environment does not care for the use of correct English grammar or correct English pronunciation. Without regard for rules, English is carelessly spoken in most of the schools and colleges. The environment most Indian students find themselves in has no regard for the use of Received Pronunciation. Different forms of English used by speakers are British English, American English, Indian English, and a host of others. Wrong intonation tunes are also picked up by the students. Unconsciously, the students internalize these sounds and pronounce these words the way it is done in their immediate linguistic environment. The phenomenon of poorly equipped teachers also contributes immensely to poor English pronunciation in the Indian ESL situation. These ill equipped teachers, who obviously are poor pronunciation models, and not well experienced in English, teach as they know, and finally end up filling the linguistic repertoires of the students with teacher-induced errors. These teachers are poorly equipped for many reasons.

1.    Teachers have no in-depth knowledge of the phonetics and phonology of English.

2.    Teachers do not use audio visual aids during oral English lessons.

3.    They do not listen to the BBC, CNN and other relevant media to get the most recent information on correct pronunciation from the native speakers

4.    Most English teachers do not have a copy of the pronouncing dictionary. Only few of the qualified phonetics teachers have electronic copies of the pronunciation dictionary that can give correct transcription of words pronounced or voice them for the user to listen

5.    Mother tongue interference is another strong cause of poor English pronunciation among Indian students. The usual thing in all the states of India

is for the child to acquire his mother tongue from birth due to association in his environment. In some environments, the child's only means of communication is that particular language or dialect which he uses all the time. By the time the child becomes a student and tries to learn phonetics or spoken English, the problem of interference from his mother tongue sets in.

**Received Pronunciation to poor English pronunciation.**

The term Received Pronunciation is usually credited to Daniel Jones. The word "received", simply means "accepted" or "approved". Received pronunciation is the standard accent of standard English in Great Britain, as spoken in the south of England. According to Catford (1977), "in the first edition of the English Pronouncing Dictionary by Daniel Jones in 1917, he named that accent public school pronunciation. However, in the second edition of his dictionary in 1926, he called the same accent "received pronunciation". This pronunciation model was also known as Oxford English because it was traditionally the common speech of Oxford University. Received Pronunciation is an accent (a form of pronunciation) and a register. It is not a dialect. It shows a great deal about the social and educational background of the person using the English Language. A speaker using Received Pronunciation will definitely speak Standard English. Received Pronunciation is believed to be based on the southern accent of England. However, it has a lot of features in common with the early modern English dialect of the east midlands; a mixture of London speech with elements of East Midlands, Middle Essex, and Essex became known as Received Pronunciation. At this point, it is important to note that as is characteristic of any language, Received Pronunciation went to a state of flux. The Cambridge English pronouncing dictionary used the term "BBC Pronunciation" because they believe that at this point, the name, "Received Pronunciation" has become archaic (Daniel Jones 2003). And that BBC News presenters no longer suggest high social class and privilege to their listeners, a particular phonetician called Jack Windsor Lewis has criticized the

term "Received Pronunciation" as "invidious, ridiculously archaic, parochial and question begging". Even the international phonetic association in their handbook use the name "Standard Southern British" in place of "Received Pronunciation." IPA Handbook (1999) states that Standard Southern British is the modern equivalent of what has been called "Received Pronunciation (RP)…" it is an accent of the South East of England which operates as a prestigious norm there and …. In other parts of the British isles and beyond. A.C. Gimson (1990) proposed conservative, general and advanced Received Pronunciation. It is this difficulty in accepting and defining RP that brought about the move from Received Pronunciation to poor English pronunciation

**Solutions to Poor English Pronunciation among Indian ESL Students**

The first solution to this problem as Gimson (1980) suggests, is taking advantage of the mental plasticity of the young student. The student should be taught correct pronunciation at a time optimal for second language learning before adolescence. This is because after this time, it will be difficult to learn pronunciation effectively.

Another effective solution is to curb the incidence of poor English pronunciation among our students and to effect that the teachers have to be given proper training in phonetics and phonology. All teachers in primary and secondary schools should not be exempted. If students listen to correct pronunciation from all their teachers, unconsciously, they will internalize these correct sound patterns and pronunciation models, and this problem of erratic pronunciation would be reduced to an extent.

Researcher recommends the establishment of a special course of instruction to teach English pronunciation and phonetics in the country. As a matter of fact, since English is official language of India, we learn it in the universities and other autonomous Institutions, this researcher suggests that a pronunciation course, probably coded English Pronunciation Methods, should be added to General Studies Courses and made a compulsory course in Indian

universities and autonomous institutions and senior secondary schools. This will mean that every graduate from the university would have passed through the course satisfactorily. This will make correct pronunciation an order of the day among Indian speakers of English.

As a remedy to poor English pronunciation, teachers should be encouraged to use different types of audio-visual aids and equipment to teach English phonetics in their classrooms. This particular point will be discussed in full detail as it is the crux of this paper. Talking and pronouncing dictionaries which are in electronic forms are included. Also, high quality materials, which are computer based and digitally propelled or driven with audio demonstrations for learners of English pronunciation both for self-access and for use in classes where the teacher needs support of this kind should be provided.

Another good remedial step to solving the problem of pronunciation is that, while teaching pronunciation in the classroom, the teacher should be conscious of the students' needs. The students obviously would have different competency levels such as competency speed and styles (Crystal 1986). The teacher should take this into cognizance as he teaches students. Different levels of attention will be given to the students depending on their rates of comprehension. More attention will be given to those who are slow to learn. The teacher would also conduct a students' needs analysis in the oral/spoken English class, with regard to pronunciation. After this, he/she would be able to develop appropriate and even materials to present in the class to reduce the learners' problem.

A good teacher will understand the psychology of his/her students; as a result, he or she would know that students who use technology are likely to stay on a task for longer periods of time. Norum, K. (1997) makes us understand that "A teacher teaching with the projector and access point will hold the attention of his subjects from the beginning to the end". To some of

the students, it is novel. So their interest will be captured and this will force them to concentrate and learn.

The internet opens new horizons for the foreign language student by facilitating communication with native speakers through e-mail and audio-digital conferencing. Students can via the e-mail ask authorities on pronunciation relevant questions on areas that confuse them like stress intonation, and rhythm. Audio-digital conferencing session can also help the students ask and receive answers to what they hitherto knew nothing about and equally learn more.

By doing the following steps, students will find the learning of pronunciation very easy:

(i) Check the pronunciation of words

(ii) Record their own voices

(iii) Train speed and

(iv) Compare themselves to native speakers.

**Conclusion**

Thus, it is believed that if these problems are critically evaluated and looked into, and seen as challenge to good pronunciation that can be surmounted, then the problem of correct pronunciation would have been solved to a large extent in India. By doing so, this problem of poor pronunciation among English as Second Language users in the most populated nation like India would have been brought to the minimum.

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