ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH BETTER PRONUNCIATION AMONG MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Kiran Kumar Boddu
PhD Research Scholar, Department of English (SSL) Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India

N S Prasantha Kumar
Assistant Professor (Sr.), Department of English (SSL) Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research paper is to analyze critically how to speak and learn English language through better pronunciation among mechanical engineering students with special reference to English speech sounds, Stress and Intonation. Better pronunciation is the better English. The sweetness of English can be extracted only through better pronunciation. Pronunciation includes use of speech sounds, stress, intonation and rhythm of a language. If mechanical engineering students take training in the speech sounds, stress, intonation and rhythm of a language accordingly, he/she will be able to pronounce better like a native speaker. This should be the aim of every mechanical engineering student who tries to learn English language from undergraduate level. Moreover, the aim should be enhancing and mastering the English Language proficiency through Better Pronunciation of speech sounds, stress, intonation and rhythm of a target language. However, at undergraduate and post graduate level of mechanical engineering students the course in Phonetics which teaches about the speech sounds, stress and intonation should be taught rigorously for improving and enhancing effective English language learning through Better Pronunciation.

Key words: English Language, Intonation, Mechanical Engineering Students, Pronunciation, Stress.

http://www.iaeme.com/IJMET/issues.asp?JType=IJMET&VType=9&IType=8
1. INTRODUCTION

English is a medium of instruction in educational institutions as well as language of courts, Governments and media; it has to be learned by every student either belongs to an arts, science or engineering. Everything is communicated in English as for now looking at global scenario. So, the course in Phonetics should be introduced at under graduate level and post graduate level in arts, science and engineering streams for better improving of English across the streams. In engineering stream, students lag behind in communication and very poor in pronunciation of some English words. They get confused very often with some words especially the technical words related to engineering subjects. To pronounce better these words engineering students should undertake course in Phonetics which improves better pronunciation by identifying how to pronounce each word with certain stress and intonation. So, mechanical engineering students should keep in mind that the more one practices the pronunciation the better English is spoken. (Cameron, 2012) says that learning to pronounce English words correctly can be one of the hardest parts of learning English for mechanical engineering students. Since the English is not our mother tongue, it can be always influenced by our mother tongue during pronunciation. At the level of speaking one faces difficulties in getting proper rhythm, tone and stress. If one has to master and improve English pronunciation he/she should follow certain instructions before getting into the course in Phonetics.

1.1. Learn the Speech Sounds of English Language

English uses different speech sounds than other languages. For example, the first sound in the word thin and the first sound in the word away are never spoken in many languages. So mechanical engineering students have to know all the English sounds. As engineering students you also have to practice your pronunciation — listen to English words and sentences, and try to repeat the English sounds as well as you can. There are 44 sounds in English Language. 24 sounds are Consonants and 20 sounds are Vowels. Further vowels are divided into two types’ pure vowels and diphthongs. Mechanical engineering students have to acquaint themselves to these sounds for better pronunciation of any word among them. (Connor, 1980)

1.2. Learn the Pronunciation of English words

As engineering student you are reading an English word does not tell you how it is pronounced. This means that, generally, you have to learn the pronunciation of every word that you use. How can mechanical student learn the pronunciation of an English word? You can look it up in a dictionary and read about how it is pronounced. Dictionaries tell you about pronunciation through a special system called “phonetic transcription”. Phonetic transcription is written in a phonetic alphabet. The most popular phonetic alphabet is the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). For this you can refer some of the following dictionaries like Advanced Oxford English Dictionary, Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, New Oxford American Dictionary and Macmillan English Dictionary. These dictionaries will teach mechanical engineering students better how to pronounce each word by taking into various parameters like stress, intonation and rhythm. (Roach, 2010)

1.3. Choose American or British Pronunciation (or both)

The most important part of English language learning is choosing pronunciation either British or American. It is always better to switch to British pronunciation as it spoken entire the world. As engineering students you have to know that different kinds of English have different pronunciation. For example, the pronunciation (the accent) in British English is
different from the pronunciation in American English. One has a choice between British English and American English, because these are the most important kinds of English in the world. Which one should one choose? Probably the kind that one likes the most. Whether you choose British or American pronunciation, people will understand you wherever you go. Of course, you don't have to decide: you can learn to speak both kinds of English. (Sethi, 1999)

1.4. Learn about both American and British Pronunciation

As an engineering student even if you choose to speak one kind of English, you should learn about both kinds. Let's suppose you want to speak pure British English. You don't want to have an American accent at all. Should you pay attention to the American pronunciations in your dictionary? We believe you should. You may want to speak British English, but you will hear some American English, too. You may go see an American movie, visit the United States, have an American teacher, etc. You may want to speak only British English, but you need to understand both British and American English. (Connor, 2012)

2. Apart from the above said characteristics of English language learning, as mechanical engineering students need to be taken into consideration the following things also for the enhancement of better pronunciation. Such as:

1. Inflections  2. Stress  3. Intonation

These elements play a vital role in effective learning of English and better pronunciation of English language. Every student should know these factors how to use them in an appropriate manner.

2. INFLECTIONS

It is the process of adding an affix (suffix) to a word to change its form according to grammar rules.

*Stem + inflectional suffix – inflected forms of one and the same word*

2.1. Inflectional Paradigm

It is a set of related words composed of the same stem and all the inflectional suffixes that can go with this stem.

*Ex: child, children, child’s, children’s*

Let us carefully examine some of the inflections that are there in English with which rarely get confused with regards to pronunciation in different contexts. They are /s/, /z/, /iz/ pronounced at different levels with the same letter ‘-s’ coming at the end of the word and /t/, /d/, /id/ as occurs at the end of the word with the letter ending ‘-ed’.

Pronunciation of ‘s’ as plural marker and third person singular present tense marker is shown here.

1. It is pronounced as /s/ when it occurs after voiceless sounds except /s, f, ts/.
   Eg: pots, taps, ships, eats, bats, keeps, cooks,
2. It is pronounced as /z/ when it occurs after voice sounds except /s, z, dʒ/.
   Eg: words, boys, dies, birds, girls, bags, soars, kills, eyes,
3. It is pronounced as /iz/ when it occurs after /s, z, f, tʃ, dʒ/.
   Eg: searches, pushes, dresses, batches, roses, bridges, benches,
(Balasubramanian, 2010)

2. ‘-ed’ as a past tense marker

1. It is pronounced as /t/ when it occurs after voiceless sounds except /t/
2. It is pronounced as /d/ when it occurs after voiced sounds except /l/.
   Eg: loved, pulled, sighed, judged, robbed, called, rowed, saved, eyed.
3. It is pronounced as /id/ when it occurs after /t, d/.
   Eg: guided, founded, waited, sided, sounded, moulded, and demanded. (Balasubramanian, 2010)

2.2. Stress
The stress is an important element of the English language Pronunciation. Pronunciation of a word depends on stress. In English, we do not say each syllable with the same force or strength. In one word, we accentuate ONE syllable. We say one syllable very loudly and all the other syllables very quietly. (Roach, 2010) Especially native speakers of English use word stress naturally. Word stress is so natural for them that they don't even know they use it. Non-native speakers, who speak English to native speakers without using word stress, encounter two problems:

- They find it difficult to understand native speakers, especially those speaking fast.
- The native speakers may find it difficult to understand them.

Types of Stress
1. Primary stress
It refers to the strong emphasis a speaker puts on the important syllable of a particular word
2. Secondary stress
It refers to a less strong emphasis on the next most important syllable.
3. Zero stress
It refers to any syllable that receives no stress and it is called unstressed syllable. (Sethi, 1999)

Stress shift:
Stress shifts from one syllable to another.
   Eg: Politics /pɔ-la-tiks/
       Political /pɔ-li-ti-kl/
       Politician /pɔ-li-ti-jn/

Word stress- Some Rules
To get better pronunciation of English one has to learn and follow the rules of Word stress carefully. The framed rules will help the mechanical engineering student where to put the stress on the particular letter of a word.

Rule 1: Words with weak prefixes always take the accent on the root.
For example,
   A'cross, a'lone, a'head, be'come, be'neath, be'tween, be'cause

Rule 2: The inflexional suffixes –ed, -es and –ing do not affect the accent. For example,
Rule 3: Words ending in –ion take the primary accent on the penultimate syllable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adm'i'ration</th>
<th>appl'i'cation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>combi'nation</td>
<td>deco'ration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rule 4: Words ending in –ic, ical, ically, -ious, -ial and –ially take the primary accent on the syllable preceding the suffix.

-ic        me'chanic, apolo'getic, pa'thetic
-ical      me'chanical, bio'logical, e'le'ctrical
-ically    me'chanically, ‘che'mically, eco'nomically
-ious       cere'monious, no'torious
-ial        com'mercial, confi'dential, me'morial
-ially      com'mercially, dra'matically (Balasubrahmanian, 2010)

Rule 5: Words ending in –ity take the accent on the ante-penultimate syllable, or the third syllable from the end.

Eg: a'bility, ca'pacity, elec'tricity, gene'rosity

2.3. Intonation
It is patterns of variation of the pitch of the voice constitute the intonation of that language. It is an important feature of spoken language as well as pronunciation.

Functions  Intonation indicates-

a) The type of utterance said by the speaker (i.e. whether it is a question or a statement, command or a request)

b) The attitude of the speaker.

Intonation patterns vary from language to language

Tone         - 2 types (Static & Kinetic)
Static Tone  - stressed syllable said on a level pitch.
              Eg:-'Sita is 'going to 'Delhi.
Kinetic Tone - stressed syllable said with a changing pitch.
              Eg:-'Sita is 'going to `Delhi.

Thus, Stress = Degree of prominence
              Tone = Stress + Pitch change

All important words in a sentence are stressed. But one word (syllable) may be more important than others. It is the nucleus & it carries the tone.

Eg:- I’ll 'ring you on `Monday.
     I’ve just 'bought a `car.

2.4. The Falling Tone
The pitch of the voice starts at a high level and falls to a low level on a single stressed syllable.

Eg: - `Thanks. `Yes. `No.
Kiran Kumar Boddu and N S Prasanth Kumar

Uses
1. In ordinary statements.
   'Glad to `meet you.
   She can 'sing `well.

   In **wh-questions** when said in a neutral way, **In commands, In exclamations, In question – tags** when you expect agreement. (Martin, 2000)

The Rising Tone
The pitch of the voice starts from a low level and rises to a high level on a single stressed syllable.

Uses
It can be used in incomplete utterances, often the first clause of a sentence. In Yes/No type questions. In Wh-questions when said in a friendly way. In polite requests or encouraging invitations. In question – tags when you do not expect agreement but simply seeking information.

3. CONCLUSIONS
Pronunciation is taken for granted when it comes to class room environment especially in engineering stream. Unless and until one practices the pronunciation with rigorous effort one cannot learn it easily. Especially, mechanical engineering students’ focus on pronunciation is very poor especially in terms of effective English language learning. It is very hard for mechanical students to pronounce some words as they basically come from rural areas where they have education in their mother tongue and they are not introduced to the Phonetics into their syllabus that is the drawback. Pronunciation should be strictly followed in Engineering undergraduate and post graduate level onwards as it improves English language learning among Mechanical engineering students. If the above parameters are followed mechanical engineering students can learn pronunciation easily without much difficulty. Mechanical students should take the help of a teacher who is trained in phonetics such as in Intonation, Stress and Rhythm can guide well. If mechanical engineering students can take part actively in phonetics course definitely it will help them to improve their English language learning pronunciation better.

REFERENCES