

Difficulties and Challenges in Teaching English as the Second and Foreign Language

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Abstract

To support the rapid growth of globalization a common language is badly needed. Fortunately English has got the honor to become that common language for communicating among the different nations. It is the language of choice in most countries of the world. Though English is the mother tongue of the United Kingdom, they alone cannot claim to be the native speakers. The United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa also come within the fold of native speakers of English. Besides, the quality of its *lingua franca* as a means of communication engulfs almost the entire globe. Moreover, in higher education, English is frequently used. Books of all subjects are available in English. The strength of English is greater than many other languages. Almost 80% information of the information technology is in English. A good volume of the services rendered through the Internet is also in English. Thus, English is playing a very significant role in bringing the world together. Therefore, many people are interested in teaching English as the *second* or *foreign* language. Despite their keen interests, the English language teachers often face various difficulties and challenges while teaching in real classroom environment with varying responses of the learners. Keeping all these facts in view, this article aims at exploring and identifying some reasons behind the problems faced by both the teachers and the learners from the perspective of pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar of English language.

1. Introduction:

There is no way to deny the fact that English is the most common and popular language in the world. Its distinctive syntactical forms, grammatical rules, and interference of different languages have made it popular. Moreover, English speaking people are leading and playing major roles in different spheres of life like trade, commerce and geopolitical issues. Historically, almost all parts of the world were under British control till the 2nd world war which played an important part to accelerate the popularity of English language. Even at present, due to the theory of unipolarization of world leaders, English speaking people are ruling all over the world. In this article I have never tried to dishonor this prestigious and popular language. What I have tried to uphold in this article is that the people of other languages, both the teachers and the learners, face some problems while teaching and learning English language. And through this article, I have identified some reasons for these problems which are sometimes very difficult and challenging.

2. Pronunciation:

Of course, Pronunciation plays an important part in human speech and communication. Correct pronunciation is the precondition of meaningful speech. To convey the actual meaning and message of the delivered speech, it must be sounded and articulated correctly. While articulating, a Non- Native English language teacher cannot maintain its proper and correct pronunciation even sometimes they cannot convey the exact message. Because, English language has some specialties and characteristics which they cannot cope up with the native speakers. They mix up the articulated words with the local accent. European people have their own accent to pronounce English words. Africans, Arabs, South-Asian and Eastern-Asian people speak English through their own phonemes. In the Arab world, the people who want to communicate in English face a great problem because, the Arabic speakers cannot pronounce [p]. They will pronounce [b]. As for example, English *park* = Arab people pronounce *bark*. Not only that, in the case of [d] they have different pronunciation. In case of [v] they pronounce [f]. English *Very* = *Fery* to Arab speakers. The Egyptians cannot pronounce *thanks*. They use to say *Sanks*. They say *sree* instead of *three*. German and Austrian speakers cannot pronounce *thousand*. They use to say *tausend*. The people of South-Asia often face a great problem. The pronunciation of [e, ee and, i] are very confusing to them. It is almost all the Same in the context of the speakers of Eastern –Asia like Japanese, Korean, Thai, Cambodian, and Chinese. These people face a lot of difficulties in distinguishing [b] and [v] as well as the [n] and [l].

The non native learners and teachers also face some difficulties in its syllable structure also. The syllable is a unit of organization in phonology. A syllable consists of a vowel and at least one consonant, though various combinations are possible. The number and type of syllables in a word, phrase or sentence may strongly influence stress and intonation. In English, The word *next* has one syllable. Arab people divide it into two syllables. They pronounce it *nekest*. In English, *excuse me* will be pronounced as *excuse me*. Japanese also often try to force vowels in between the consonants (e.g., *desks* /desks/ becomes "desukusu" or *milk shake* /milk feik/ becomes "mirukushēku")

In English language there are frequent use of **stressed** and **unstressed** syllables and words. These stressed and unstressed syllables and words often create a great confusion among the learners of English from other language. The stressed syllable or syllables in a word are the ones that get pronounced more forcefully. The unstressed syllable or syllables in a word are the ones that get pronounced less forcefully. For example; the adverb *forcefully* has the first syllable stressed, and the other two syllables unstressed: *force'ful ly*. If you said *forceFULLY*, the word would sound wrong. When we ask someone '*where are you from?*' We keep a stress on *from* but when we ask '*are you from around here?*' we keep stress on *here*. In cases of variation of languages, unstressed vowels may be transformed or disappeared. In word *chocolate* has four syllables in Spanish, but Americans pronounce only two: "*choc-lit*".

Moreover, The English native speakers often like to use **Contractions** and **Reductions** which may confuse the language learners of the other regions. In normal speech, English speakers do not say some words clearly- they use a reduced form.

Long form

Reduced form

I don't know.

I *dunno*.

It's nice to meet you.

It's nice to *meetcha*.

We aren't going to open a bank.

We aren't *gonna* open a bank.

Do you want to eat something?

Do you *wanna* eat something?

These reductions also create a great problem for the non-native English teacher also. Because in most of the cases they cannot be able to make it clear to the learners. The syllabic structures and constructions of the words like *dunno*, *meetcha*, *gonna*, *wanna*, *hafta*(have to) are very hazy, critical and unexplainable.

Furthermore, In English language there are frequent use of **Homograph**, **Homophones** and **Homonyms** which are very difficult to identify and to understand the differences and similarity of the words to the learners of English as the second language. Here I give some examples of these three important machineries.

Homograph:

Lead (V)/ (N)/li:d/

Live (have existence) (v)/ lɪv/

Lead (soft metal) /led/

Live (having life /laɪv/ (adjective)

Tear (eye's water) /tɪə(r)

Use (Verb) /ju:z

Tear (make into pieces) /teə(r)

Use (noun) /ju:s

Homophone:

Air ere heir /eə(r)

Meat meet mete /mi:t/

Pare pair pear /peə(r)/

Flew flu flue /flu:/

Homonyms:

Blind/bláɪnd/: (adj) unable to see.

Blind/bláɪnd/: Window shadow, screen for a window.

Brook/bruk:/: small river.

Brook/bruk:/: (verb) to tolerate.

Fast/fa:st/:quick/ rapid/ modern.

Fast/fa:st/:to go without food.

Tender/tendə(r): delicate, kind.

Tender/tendə(r): offer/ present.

3. Spelling:

Due to the entrance of a lot of words and phrases from different languages like Danish, Norman, French, Classical Latin and Greek, and the frequent use of stressed or unstressed syllable, homograph, homophone, homonyms and contractions, English spelling has become one of the difficult issues for both the learners and the teachers of other languages. Since a written standard developed with the large influx of foreign words and with different and overlapping spelling patterns,¹ Many English words are not spelled as they are spoken. This difference between pronunciation and spelling causes a lot of confusion. The combination "ough" provides an excellent example:

Tough - pronounced -tuf (the u sounds as 'cup')

Through - pronounced - throo

Dough- pronounced- doe (long 'o')

Bought-pronounced- bawt

Swallowed Syllables - Three Syllables Pronounced as Two Syllables:

Aspirin	-	pronounced	-	asprin
Different	-	pronounced	-	diffrent
Every	-	pronounced	-	evry

Swallowed Syllables - Four Syllables Pronounced as Three Syllables:

Comfortable	-	pronounced	-	comftable
Temperature	-	pronounced	-	temprature
Vegetable	-	pronounced	-	vegetable

Sometimes the words sound same:

Two -	to	-too	- pronounced	-	too
Knew-	new		-pronounced	-	niew
through-	threw		-pronounced	-	throo
not-	knot	-naught	-pronounced	-	not

The following letters are silent when pronounced.

D	sandwich	Wednesday	
G	sign	foreign	
K	know	knight	knob
L	should walk	half	
P	psychology		
S	island		
T	whistle listen	fasten	
U	guess	guitar	
W	who	write	wrong

4. Vocabulary:

As English vocabulary is a mixture of various languages, it creates a lot of difficulties and confusion for the foreign learners and teachers of English who wants to acquire English vocabulary. They may know the basic form of the word, but sometimes they may not be acquainted with the other forms for the same thing. For example, from the word **House**, which is basically a plain Germanic word, a number of word In English are built on this basic word.

HOUSE +ING= HOUSING

HOUSE+HOLD= HOUSEHOLD

HOUSE+WIFE= HOUSEWIFE

There are more words whose meaning is **HOUSE** and **HOME** related based on Latin word **DOMUS** (home). These are: **DOMESTIC**, **DOMICILE** and **DOMESTICITY**. There is also another set of words based on the Latin word **RESIDERE**. These include RESIDE, **RESIDENT**, **RESIDENCE** and **RESIDENTIAL**. People of many other languages only use a single basic form, but Native English Speakers, learners and teachers often use two or three different forms.

In the context of vocabulary, sometimes the non-native speakers become confused to see the words that are a little bit different from **American** and **British English** according to meaning and appearance. "Although, the differences between British and American pronunciation are not such as should cause any alarm for the future, any fear that Englishmen and Americans may become unintelligible to each other."²

Americans speak more slowly and with less variety of tone. "American speech is much more monotonous but it is generally more distinct in its division of syllable than those of British type".³ American Speeches is more '**nasal twang**' biased than the British one.⁴ Here are some examples of American and British words.

British English

Colour
Labour
Favourite
Centre
Theatre
Analogue
Catalogue
Cheque
Disc
Car
Railway
Windshield
Lorry
First Floor
Programme
Plough

American English

Color
Labor
Favorite
Center
Theater
Analog
Catalog
check
Disk
Automobile
Railroad
Wind screen
Truck
Ground Floor
Program
plow

Moreover, there are a number of **Phrasal verbs** which differs between British and American English. For example, in order to express the idea of telephoning someone, British people use **to ring someone up** whereas the Americans prefer the expression **to call someone**.

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5. Grammar:

Grammar is clearly at the center of learning any language. “But it is equally clear that its nature cannot be accounted for by demonstrating its rules by a random use of any lexical items that come to mind.”⁵ Because of these various lexical items and forms, complicated rules and regulations, teachers and learners of other languages strive and they are often unable to understand the appropriate meaning of any sentence or word on first or second reading. Here we discuss some grammatical items which are very hazy for the people of other languages.

Number is a category of **noun** by which **persons, animals and objects** can be counted and referred to. There are two numbers in English language: Singular and Plural. But in **Sanskrit** and **Greek** there are three numbers: Singular, Dual and plural. In the Chinese and Vietnamese there is no grammatical category of number. In these languages the distinction between **one** and **many** is made by means of numeral or a word meaning ‘**several**’.⁶ There are many words which often confuse the foreign learners in the context of numbers. For example, the Plural of **cat** is **cats**, **goat** is **goats** but the plural of **sheep** is **sheep** and the plural of **deer** is **deer**. There are more words whose plural often confuse the learners of foreign language.

Singular	Plural
Life	Lives
Half	Halves
Roof	Roofs
Dwarf	Dwarfs
Safe	Safes
Staff	Staffs

We see the variation of the use of s/es/ves. There are some words whose plurals are formed by changing vowels.

Singular	Plural
Man	Men
Goose	Geese
Foot	Feet
Mouse	Mice
Louse	Lice

There are some words while changing into plural we have to add en, ren, ne.

Singular	Plural
Ox	Oxen
Child	Children
Brother	Brethren/Brothers
Cow	Kine/cows

Moreover, in English Numbers, there are some Greek and Latin words which are very confusing to the non native speakers and learners.

Singular	Plural
Axis	Axes
Analysis	Analyses
Parenthesis	Parentheses
Alumnus	Alumni
Focus	Foci
Syllabus	Syllabi
Agenda	Agendum
Datum	Data
Media	Medium
Memorandum	Memoranda

Many foreign learners of English language are often confused and cannot differentiate the dealings of **tenses** between Present Continuous and Present Perfect Continuous, between past continuous and past perfect continuous, and between future continuous and future perfect continuous. For example:

I am doing my duty carefully. (Present continuous)

I have been doing my duty carefully since morning. (Present perfect continuous)

He was doing the work (past continuous).

He had been doing the work (past perfect continuous).

He will be waiting for you (future continuous).

He will have been waiting for you (future perfect continuous).

The structure of these tenses is different, but it is very difficult to identify the action of time for a foreign learners.

The great problem which the learners of foreign language face is the use of **regular** and **irregular** verbs. They become confused to see that while changing tenses, some verbs end with **ed** and some do not, some have different forms. To avoid this confusion the teachers often suggest learners to memorize. Memorizing grammatical items is obviously a tough job for the foreign learners.

6. Suggestions:

Keeping all these in mind, we can consider as well as allow the learners and, to some extent, teachers in cases of pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary and grammar also. We should keep in mind that EFL and ESL learners have a lot of problem because their native tongue may not have that particular sound. Although it's very difficult to memorize IPA for foreign learners, it's an essential part of learning correct pronunciation. Teachers can choose the drilling method with easy words.

In real class room situations, language teachers should articulate words naturally, so that learners can receive exact pronunciation- not too slow, not too fast. Learners need to hear each sound clearly.

Regarding vocabulary and spelling, teachers can avoid over emphasizing spelling rules. It should be remembered that thinking is more important than memorizing which leads to more permanent learning. To enhance the number of vocabulary, EFL and ESL learners can read the text more and more. They should find the books to read their own. The more they read the more new word's they will see and the more they will learn about the words. Foreign learners are suggested to create a personal dictionary to keep a record of key vocabularies and transition words. They can practice building stories, essays and paragraphs using the recorded words. The teachers and parents can engage the learners of preliminary in conversations every day. Teachers should articulate new and interesting words in their conversation with students. Sometimes it is the best to allow the EFL learners to read passages and simply skip words they cannot decode or read.

Grammar classes shouldn't be too much formal. Many interesting things like examples, stories etc can be added by the teachers while teaching grammatical rules

in the class room. They should use various examples to avoid monotony. Teachers can apply the audio-visual methods to make the grammar class more interesting to the learners. If the examples of a particular item of grammar are delivered to them from our practical life, it must be more fruitful. After a lecture on grammar part, teachers can take a test and ask the learners to locate the grammatical mistakes. They can allow their students to cross check to find out any mistake or a teacher can ask students to find and correct errors in a particularly troubled paper, using a handbook and working out the grammar rules together.

7. Conclusion:

From the above discussions it is clear that I have found some issues to prove that there are some difficulties and challenges while learning and teaching English as a second language. Though through this article I have wanted to prove some difficulties and challenges to learn as well as to teach English as a second language, no one can deny the fact that English has become the most popular language to communicate among the people of different countries, different cultures and different languages. And most of the people of other language very easily can learn or teach English. Because it has only twenty six letters, very easily understandable grammatical rules and very sober pronunciation. Whereas twenty eight letters are in Arabic alphabet, fifty in Bengali, thirty eight in Urdu. Chinese don't have any alphabet. They have sounds called *Pinyin*. On the other hand, many words are borrowed frequently to English language. And for this reason, many speakers of other language find some familiar words of his own language which has paved the way for English language to become a global language.

References:

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6. An Introductory Text Book of Linguistics and Phonetics, p-226, 227.

