International Multidisciplinary
Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

DEVELOPING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPEAKING CONFIDENCE: A CASE STUDY OF PRONUNCIATION AMONG STUDENTS OF ODISHA

Sudhansu Kumar Dash

Abstract:-English is a vehicle for international communication. In order to meet the demands of modern society, English teachers need to pay more attention to the development of learners' competence and focus on a more effective and successful method. However traditional approaches to English language teaching still dominate Indian classrooms. Language teachers should not focus on reciting but should teach from their own understanding of language learning and help learners gain more competence with confidence.

Keywords: Pronunciation , international communication , modern society.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) the necessity for, and method of, teaching pronunciation has become a controversial topic. Many second language educators have varied opinions on the importance of including pronunciation practice within their lesson plans. Classroom activities should cater to what their students consider their most important personal goals or reasons for learning the language. For example, students may wish to build their vocabulary skills or strengthen their testing skills in English. Regardless of current trends or what students may feel their selected needs are, it is safe to say that teaching pronunciation is often considered essential in an ESL class where survival skills are imperative to the students' daily lives. In an ESL setting, the students must not only increase their English comprehension for the classroom, but also need to communicate and interact in English outside the class in various situations. Students need to understand and to be understood. If they cannot hear English well, they are cut off from the language except in printed form. If they cannot be understood easily, they are cut off from conversation with native speakers. In the English as a foreign language (EFL) setting, survival skills play a less important role. English is not necessary for students to communicate with each other. English is not often used to make friends or to be understood outside of the classroom. It would be easy, therefore, for the teacher to neglect implementing pronunciation tasks in their lessons because they feel there is little or no need for the students to work on that aspect of the language. This attitude denies the students the opportunity to gain precise command of the English language. The process of learning English is interconnected. This means that each area of the language that is being taught helps improve other aspect of the language. Pronunciation and listening comprehension are linked together by a unified system within which individual sounds are systematically related. Students need this sense of a system in order to make sense of the separate pieces. If the students' English pronunciation skills are improved, clearly their listening skills and speaking skills become more refined. Spelling skills are also improved when the knowledge of English pronunciation has been increased.

EFFECTS OF LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF PRONUNCIATION

Research has shown that a command of native or close-to-native pronunciation of a foreign language is no easy task, especially for learners who begin studying a foreign language after puberty. Although non-native pronunciation and intonation are not necessarily obstacles to successful communication with English speakers from other parts of the world, too much accented or distorted speech will frequently give rise to misunderstandings, miscommunication and frustration. Incomprehensible non standard pronunciation and intonation will produce psychological nervousness in speakers, which is likely to also block their efforts to seek clarification or to paraphrase

Sudhansu Kumar Dash, "DEVELOPING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPEAKING CONFIDENCE: A CASE STUDY OF PRONUNCIATION AMONG STUDENTS OF ODISHA", Golden Research Thoughts | Volume 4 | Issue 8 | Feb 2015 | Online & Print

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using alternative expressions with phonetically different pronunciation and intonation. All communication is intentional communication and that understanding is a matter of interpreting what is intended rather than decoding the referential meaning of utterances. However, it is obvious that this kind of interpretation should take the interlocutors' speech as its basis in face to face spoken interaction. But meanings are blurred, distorted, or buried when pronunciation is grossly unclear or inaccurate.

Pronunciation is a key element of the learning of oral skills in a second language. The role it plays in an English language program varies and the amount of time and effort devoted to it seems to depend to a large degree on the individual teacher. This means that it may or may not form part of regular classroom activity or student self-study. However, students so often cite pronunciation as being very important and a priority for them. Confidence influences students to speak out. They will not be afraid of making mistakes or being blamed. The necessity of confidence in articulation is that when teaching pronunciation, working through a list of sounds and practice are important. With regular practice, learners improve their performance and feel confident

2. THE PROBLEM

Odisha students tend to use Odia speech patterns or styles when speaking English. Some will not speak out because they are afraid of making mistakes and are embarrassed. Pronunciation training and Language Learning Strategies (LLS) may improve their competence. This study focused on if and how pronunciation training with LLS increased confidence and improved learners to become intelligible speakers. Being an intelligible speaker is to understand and to be understood. As English teaching has moved to language functions and communicative competencies, a new urgency for the teaching of pronunciation has arisen. In Odisha however, pronunciation has not yet received similar attention. The experience of the researcher is that, a great number of students have many difficulties in pronunciation. When speaking English, with very little or poorly trained pronunciation skills, they have problems either making themselves understood or understanding others. A review of the studies of teacher attitudes and practices revealed that pronunciation is an area that some teachers avoid or are reluctant to teach. Teaching in ESL programs in Odisha face some difficulties meeting the pronunciation learning needs of their students, and have indicated that many teachers tend to avoid dealing with pronunciation because they lack confidence, skills and knowledge. Into this, these studies found that curricula, methodology and the lack of suitable materials, all contributed to inadequacies of teaching and learning in this area, although both students and teachers see the value of intelligible pronunciation in second language learning. Generally, pronunciation plays an important role in helping the learner become an intelligible speaker. There are many obstacles for teachers on Odisha to teach English including insufficient English language skills. The researcher learned that college teachers in Odisha seldom teach the phonetics of English words and few of them are familiar with phonetic symbols. As for learners, they wish they could speak English fluently but most of them think that English is too challenging for them to be competent because of interference from the mother tongue (Odia) particularly in pronunciation and being too shy to speak English. Further Odisha students have problems of listening to dialogues and texts as well as problems of pronunciation. English curricula in the colleges of Odisha cannot meet the demands for English. The skills needed most are listening and speaking which have minor focus in Odisha secondary English books but are not the focus skills in tertiary education English curriculum .The researcher would like to help Odia students to be confident when speaking English.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This reviews of literature studies of the importance of pronunciation training, awareness raising, positive attitude and motivation that affect learners' acquisition, and discusses how language learning strategies help learners improve their pronunciation in the target language and lead to confidence in speaking. Discussions of English language learning and teaching are also presented. O'Malley and Chamot (1990:29) define learning strategies as "special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" and classify these strategies into three major types: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and Social/affective strategies. Drawing on the research byO'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) enables the researcher to compile almost comprehensive classification of language learning strategies with six major categories. The direct strategies consist of memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies; the indirect category contains metacognitive strategies, affective language learning strategies, and social strategies. Oxford (1990b:71) distinguishes between direct LLS, "which directly involve the subject matter", i.e. the L2 or FL, and indirect LLS, which "do not directly involve the subject matter itself, but are essential to language learning nonetheless". One point to note about the learning strategies is that they "are not the preserve of highly capable individuals, but could be learned by others who had not discovered them on their own" (O'Malley & Chamot 1990:31).The argument that learning strategies are teachable also helps to break the myth that some learners have an aptitude for languages and thus achieve high language proficiency without too much effort. This preconceived notion may demotivate under achieving learners so much that they give up learning and teachers seem not to play a significant part in the language

classroom. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, development in the area of second language acquisition research turned attention away from a teaching-centered perspective to one which included interest in how the actions of learners might affect their acquisition of language. In other words, the belief that individual learners' endeavors tend to be a governing factor in the language learning process gradually formed among a number of scholars (Schmitt1997). Language teachers, therefore, were motivated to examine what individual learners, especially successful learners, do in their study in order to elicit useful information on the process of language acquisition. Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) are two of the earliest researchers who shifted their focus from teaching methods and materials to a more learner-centered aspect, maintaining that successful language learners employ a variety of learning strategies in their study to facilitate language acquisition.

4. OBJECTIVES

4.1. General objectives.

The study aimed to investigate pronunciation training and language learning strategies and establish if, how and to what extent those approaches increase confidence and improve communicative competence of learners.

4.2. Specific objectives

1. To demonstrate the importance of pronunciation training in a classroom, in order to prompt more teachers to reconsider the relationship between the student and pronunciation.
2. To investigate the use of a LLS framework, if and how it enhances the communicative competence, specifically, the learners' speaking skill.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the training, to see if, how and to what extent the approaches raise the learners' awareness of their improvement and confidence in speaking.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study is a collaborative action research investigation to develop pronunciation training and communicative competence for Odisha students studying English in Odisha. This study investigated pronunciation training and language learning strategies, how they influenced the learning behavior of students of Odisha studying English and improved their speaking confidence. The purpose of the training is to improve students' pronunciation and spoken intelligibility. It draws upon data collected in pronunciation training in thirty two colleges in Odisha using language learning strategies and evaluated improvement after being trained in developing speaking confidence. The project contains two cycles, the first of which was to train 32 teachers using pronunciation training and language learning strategies. This research was undertaken as action research and focused on two approaches: 1) pronunciation training and 2) Language Learning Strategies (LLS). Both were used in the training for participants. There were 32 English teachers and 128 students selected from teachers' classes, to establish if, how and to what extent the approaches increase confidence and improve the communicative competence of learners. The improvement and confidence gained from those three areas were recorded through learners' reports. The pronunciation training was conducted according to Schmidt's three aspects of consciousness involved in language learning: awareness, intention and knowledge and using course outlines The Collins Cobuild Learner's Dictionary was used to check the correctness of each word pronounced in class as well as self directed learning and assessment.

5.1. Structure of the research

The study was undertaken in two cycles to demonstrate the importance of pronunciation training and language learning strategies that support learners to achieve their language learning. It covers three areas that aimed to provide learners with a comprehensive insight into ways of teaching pronunciation and self directed learning. First, the area of pronunciation: segmental aspects (the study of sounds), and supra segmental aspects (the study of stress, rhythm and intonation). Second, the area of language learning strategies and pronunciation learning strategies which learners used in the classroom to achieve their goals

5.2. Research questions

The study sought answers to these questions:

1. Does pronunciation training and LLS increase confidence and improve communicative competence of learners?
2. To what extent does pronunciation training using segmental and supra segmental aspects and LLS contribute to the improvement of learners' competence that help learners to speak confidently, and at what level?

3. What impact does training have on learner confidence and how is it reported?

6. FINDINGS

The researcher evaluated their improvement in correct speech and in developing speaking confidence. In the second cycle, these teachers in turn taught a group of four students each and similar improvements were observed. The action phases showed the implications of the importance of pronunciation training in Odisha context and the usefulness of dictionary usage to help learners to improve their competence and to have more confidence to speak English. The project resulted in a change of policy by the council to include pronunciation teaching and to allocate English classes to teachers who understood that process. The pronunciation learning strategies in this study and those of other researchers were presented to formulate strategies as a contribution for teachers to include teaching pronunciation in their classroom instruction. The researcher intends that the data will be useful for language teachers to help them further their understanding of their students' learning behavior to achieve improved pronunciation. In addition, the phonetic symbol system used in the training was chiefly inspired from the symbols of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) to be standardized and easy to apply. However, the researcher would present here for references some coded symbols shown in this study which can be used for readers who are unfamiliar with the IPA alphabet. They are/th/ =/   /, /th/ voiced = /? /, /zh/ = /? /, /j/ = /d? /, /sh/ = /S/ and /ch/=/tS/.

6.1. Levels of English skills of Odia students

English is generally the first foreign language that students must study in schools. Odisha's' level of English proficiency is low in comparison with many states in India e.g.Karnatak, Kerala, Delhi and Maharastra. The revised proficiency-based curriculum will provide students with the opportunity to continue their English education without interruption and to facilitate life-long learning .From studies of the levels of Odia students' English ability in speaking and listening between 1972 and 1988 was in Grade 7- 9 was very poor. Students have problems in listening to dialogues and texts as well as problems of pronunciation. Researchers have also finds that the English curriculum in the universities of Odisha cannot meet the demands of English used in the workplace. The skills used most are listening and speaking, which are not the focus skills in the Odisha tertiary education English curriculum.

6.2. English problem sounds for Odia students

Language is a cognitive skill, which includes productive skills of writing and speaking and receptive skills of reading and writing as well as language components, namely vocabulary, structure and phonology the English sounds which are considered problem sounds for Odisha students can be divided into three categories:

1)Sounds that do not occur in Odia: These sounds are /? / e.g. van, every; /? /or /th/ e.g. thin, breath; /? /or /th/ e.g. mother, then; /?/ e.g. zero, nasal; /S /or /sh/ e.g. share, notion; /? / or /zh/ e.g casual, beige;/tS/or /ch/ e.g. future, cherry; /d? /or /j/ e.g. gentle, jelly and /?/ e.g. gamble, legal. Normally Odia students cannot pronounce these sounds though they exist in the odia language

2)Although some English sounds exist in odia, they do not occur at the final position in odia and most Odia students fail to pronounce them when they appear finally in English words .

a. /l/ substituted by /n/
b. /f/ substituted by unreleased /ß/
c. /s/ substituted by unreleased /d/
d. /s/ may be omitted when occurs after diphthongs /ai/ e.g. nice,/au/ i.e. house, /? i/ e.g. rejoice. This is because in Odia there is no consonant sound following these diphthongs.
e. /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, and /k/ are pronounced as unreleased instead of released sounds because these sounds are pronounced unreleased when they occur in final position in Odia words.

Sounds that are phonetically different from Odia equivalents: /r/, /i/,/e/, /u/, and /o/; that is, their production is not the same. The English/r/ sound can be formed in the ways depending upon different speakers and dialects. For example, retroflex/r/ is made by moving the sides of the tongue against the back teeth. The front of the tongue is lowered but the tip is turned upward and withdrawn towards the back of the mouth, whereas the odia /r/ sound is just a trilled /r/. Tense vowels such as /i/, /e/, /u/, and /o/ are slight diphthongs; that is, they are pronounced with a diphthongal quality. The degree of diphthongization is greatest when these slight diphthongs occur in a stressed syllable. On the other hand, the Odia vowels of /i/, /e/, /u/, and /o/ do not have this diphthongal quality. The strategies for overcoming incomprehension are simply another aspect of the total communication-language learning process. Teachers need to help learners become aware of strategies they need for effective communication, whether in making

themselves understood, or in understanding what another speaker has said.

6.3. The researcher's inspiration and problem identification

The idea of pronunciation training to improve communicative competence and confidence of non-native speakers was clearly identified from the researcher's experience in pronunciation teaching. The development of the researcher's pronunciation teaching and training was as follows. After the researcher finished his Bachelor's degree in 1982, the researcher was inspired to think about the idea of pronunciation training from the BBC in All India Radio he presented English language in Odia accent as much he knew. He saw that the other presenters were reluctant, uncomfortable and passed quickly when they had to speak English words. The researcher wondered why Odia people were afraid of speaking English. What problems were they having? His interest had focused on this area since then. The researcher completed Masters Degree in language learning in 1992 and discovered that confidence increased when speakers improved articulation and with regular practice they could improve performance and confidence. .As the researcher of this project, is working in a college he is responsible for teaching English to the students he is teaching that is Shreedhara Swamy College of Education and Technology in Dhenkanal District of Odisha. At the time of this research, the researcher is curious about why Odisha students kept silent in an English class when they were faced with foreigners. The researcher served his curiosity by contributing to teaching English in his institution. The researcher taught a group of students that was weak in English and helped them in many problem areas of English but his interest focuses on teaching Odia students to speak phonetically and correctly. The researcher has a strong intention to develop and improve students' abilities to speak with both accuracy and fluency and to become intelligible speakers. He found that they tended to learn English word for word and to memorize the pronunciation of individual English words. Because they are unable to make use of phonetic symbols to remember unfamiliar words, they had difficulty developing extensive vocabularies in English.

6.4. Development from accuracy based to fluency based learning

The researcher continued teaching pronunciation as his first job, which was in the area of English language teaching. He found that students were happy to learn about the articulation of sounds and symbols. Students' reports were positive though they claimed that they needed more practice and the researcher agreed that practice was the way to improve. The researcher knows that he can't speak as perfect as a native speaker just after one quarter's study. It was impossible. The researcher became quite clear it is a long way to improve English speaking. What is important is that the researcher learned the ways to improve his pronunciation and realized his weakness, then, could practice and apply the rules to himself in the future. The reports from the students reflecting on their achievement inspired the researcher to search for answers and start the project of pronunciation teaching. They would happily speak English after the course although they were not fluent. The researcher regularly planned his lessons from the suggestions of learners, teachers and researchers to develop an appropriate course for learners. The lessons put more focus on learners' fluency. The researcher searched from many researchers such as Morley and Derwing, Munro and Wiebe who state that effective English pronunciation training should include both 'segmental' and 'suprasegmental' aspects, that is sounds, stress and intonation. The terms segmental and suprasegmental aspects were defined by many researchers such as Morley as 'micro and macro level 'and 'accuracy-based and fluency-based learning'. Therefore the researcher revised his lesson plan adding suprasegmental aspects and taught his students, and it worked well.

The realization of the researcher is that only the study of sounds is not enough. It became better after he added stress and intonation (suprasegmental aspects).He wanted to know if the same lesson was effective for other learners. Therefore he used the same pronunciation course to teach learners in this research study with the goal of achieving understandability or intelligibility. It is felt that pronunciation is tied to identity and therefore the degree to which the learner seeks to identify with the English speaking group will directly influence that learner's pronunciation. For better results, the researcher studied other pronunciation research to find how to make it more effective and found that within communicative approaches to language teaching, a key goal is for learners to develop communicative competence in the target language, and language learning strategies (LLS) can help them to improve their competencies. The researcher added instruction on language learning strategies to the familiarization session and found that instruction which focused on general speaking habits as opposed to a concentration on individual segments has a positive effect on learners 'abilities and their achievement.

7. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The researcher hopes the study will help bring change in the Odisha curricula in teaching English and the skills of English teachers will be focused on teaching pronunciation in class and introducing the strategies to help students achieve in their learning. It may be suggested that the use of the dictionary to help learners to self-correct their pronunciation and support self directed learning. It is hoped that teachers will learn from the study about the importance of pronunciation and language learning strategies that support students' learning, and change their view

of teaching.

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Sudhansu Kumar Dash

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